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How To
Answer
Interview
Questions



***50 Tough
Questions***
*That Could Kill Your
Interview Chances*
- ANSWERED!

Peggy McKee

How To **Answer** Interview Questions

50 Tough Questions – ANSWERED!

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Peggy McKee



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About the Author

Peggy McKee is an expert resource and a dedicated advocate for job seekers. Known as the Sales Recruiter from Career Confidential, her years of experience as a nationally-known recruiter for sales and marketing jobs give her a unique perspective and advantage in developing the tools and strategies that help job seekers stand head and shoulders above the competition. Peggy has been named one of the [Top 25 Most Influential Online Recruiters by HR Examiner](#), and has been quoted in articles from [CNN](#), [CAP TODAY](#), [Yahoo!HotJobs](#), and the [Denver Examiner](#).

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In 1999 Peggy founded PHC Consulting, a very successful medical sales recruiting firm. When she consistently found herself offering advice to jobseekers who weren't even her own candidates, she developed a new business model in order to offer personalized ca-

reer coaching as well as the tools jobseekers need to thrive and succeed in the job search...and Career Confidential was born.

Today, Career Confidential offers more than 30 products, tools, and webinars for job seekers. Peggy receives positive responses every day from candidates who have used them to land the job of their dreams, and she loves that she has been able to contribute to their success.

Links:

Job Interview Question-Answer App:

<http://jobinterviewquestionsandanswersapp.com>

Top 25 Most Influential Online Recruiters:

<http://www.hrexaminer.com/lists/top-25-most-influential-online-recruiters-v2/1-peggy-mckee>

CNN: http://articles.cnn.com/2010-06-29/living/unemployment.scarlet.letter.stigma_1_job-seekers-recruiters-job-hunt?_s=PM:LIVING

CAP TODAY:

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Yahoo!HotJobs:

<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/career-articles-how-to-end-a-job-interview-1398>

Denver Examiner:

<http://www.examiner.com/job-search-in-denver/how-to-get-a-better-job-faster>

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Job Interview Question 1

Are you overqualified for this job?

If you get asked this question in your job interview, you may jump straight to frustrated—especially if you’re an older worker and assume they’re telling you you’re just too old. But companies facing hiring issues really don’t want to make a mistake. They don’t want to go to the time and expense of hiring someone who will just move on to something that pays more as soon as they find it. And most people want to climb the ladder and make more money, so why wouldn’t you?



So when they ask you if you have too much experience, think about the question behind the question. What they’re really asking is, are you going to be bored? Is this really the right position for you? Are you really going to be satisfied here? Drill down a little more and it’s: Are you a fit for this job?

Answer that question. They’re looking for you to help them feel better about hiring you.

You can do that with the answer you give and believe me, they’re listening. They know they can learn a lot about you from

what you choose to say.

Here are some suggestions:

“I might be overqualified, but wouldn’t that be wonderful for you? Because then you’d have someone who was more than ready to do well in this...someone who’s done this before, who understands what it takes to be successful at it and can do it again.” Remember, they always need to know the answer to those 4 unasked job interview questions: Do you understand the job? Can you do the job? Will you do the job? Do you pose a risk to their own continued employment?

Or you can say, “The truth is that I am overqualified for the job. But it looks wonderful to me because of X, Y, and Z.” X, Y, and Z are your own reasons why this job fits you (other than money or responsibilities or possibility for advancement).

And it could be anything. I remember speaking to one gentleman who was clearly overqualified for the job he was applying for, but who wanted it because the commute was significantly shorter. The company was freaking out because they didn’t understand, but he said, “Hey, my house is paid off so I don’t need the money, and I like where I live. I’m not interested in moving. I just want to live my life. And right now, my job requires a 2-hour round-trip ordeal every day. I don’t want that anymore. This place is 5 minutes from my house. That extra time in my day would be worth a lot to me.”

Once he communicated that to them, they understood and were excited about hiring him.

You have to tell them why they’re perfect for you. They may not always understand it on their own.

And they will make assumptions about you. You can’t just think that they will take you at face value. This is a big risk for them and they want to not make a mistake. So help them see why you’re a great fit.

Job Interview Question 2

Are you willing to relocate?

Are you willing to move for your job? In many companies, this is a typical job interview question. Sometimes it's a deal-breaker, sometimes it isn't. Even if this particular job doesn't require it, many companies want that flexibility in their employees for long-term growth potential.

The knee-jerk answer that most people give ("I'd consider it for the right opportunity.") is not your best answer. Even if it is the truth. Because it puts your motivation for wanting the job more into the 'money' category rather than the 'fulfilling work / great fit' category. It's a subtle but important distinction, and it will take the shine off your candidacy if you say it.

Here's how to handle the relocation question for several different life circumstances you might be in:

If you're a 'No'

If your answer is unequivocally 'no', you have to say so. It's only going to cause you problems if they do end up offering you the job and you won't move. (Although, let me just say that if it's "absolutely not", remember that life can turn on a dime. What looks like "never" right now might not look like that in a few months or a year. If you really want this job, and you can't move immediately, say so.



But consider saying something like, "I'd rather not move right now, but you never know what tomorrow will bring. And I'm very interested in this position and this company."

If you're a 'Maybe'

But maybe you feel like there's some wiggle room. You'd rather not commit to packing up your entire life just yet, but you don't want this job to slip through your fingers because of it. For a lot of people, you really don't want to move...the kids are settled, your family is here, your house is underwater (see which states have the most homes underwater)...but for the right offer you'd consider it. You know you can't say that, so try something like, "I'm interested in growing my career, and if relocating for the job is a necessary part of that, of course I'd consider it." That doesn't commit you to moving. It just confirms that your career (and this job) is important. And it's tactful.

Or you could toss it back to them: "Where I live is not the most important issue for me. Utilizing my skills, developing new ones, and advancing my career are really my driving interests, and I've become more and more convinced that this company and this job is a really great fit because of my skills in X, Y, and Z. Do you agree?"

You've stayed on track, selling yourself for the job, and redirected the conversation (hopefully). If they keep pushing, you can fall back to the "of course I'd consider it" statement.

None of these answers commit you to anything. But all of them help you appear to be more sincere, flexible, tactful, and reasonable than "I'd consider it for the right opportunity." They keep the conversation going in a positive direction, which is a big plus for any job interview.

Job Interview Question 3

Describe a time when your work was criticized and how you handled it.

Have you ever been asked this question? I know...to you, it feels like oral surgery without the Novocain...but interviewers love behavioral interviews because they tell them so much about you—in the story you choose to tell, how you tell it, with what kind of attitude, and the results you're capable of producing under pressure. They just can't get as good a picture of what life would be like with you on the job from only asking about your skills and qualifications.



The criticism question is one of those **adversity pieces** that you've always got to have a story or two about in your back pocket for interviews.

The truth is, to be a good employee (or an overall successful person), you've always got to be open to criticism. If you're not open to criticism, then you're not coachable. If you're not coachable, then you're less valuable than you could be.

Are you coachable?

Coachability is huge. Taking criticism is important. If when

you get criticism, you have a problem with always wanting to be defensive and not simply soaking up how you could have done it differently, then you'll find that people will give you less and less criticism. That might sound like a good thing, but it isn't. If they can't communicate with you and help you be better (which helps them to be better), they'll eventually just fire you. Does that seem extreme? It's because your boss (or anyone you need to learn something from) can't teach you anything new without correcting you once in a while. Since no one's perfect, everyone needs to be corrected or coached to a new place or behavior in order to keep being successful.

So what they're really looking for is, **are you coachable?** Tell me about a time when someone told you how you could do something different or better, how you did do it different or better, and then what the results were.

That's the **STAR technique** that all job seekers should be familiar with for behavioral interviews. STAR stands for Situation or Task, Action, and Result. Stories put into that structure are particularly effective in job interview situations. You talk about the situation you were in and the task in front of you, the action you choose to take and the results you got from it (what happened). Choose an incident or experience from your work history, put it into that structure, and you've got yourself a story that illustrates why you're such a great pick for the job.

Job Interview Question 4

Describe a time when your workload was heavy and how you handled it.

Asking you to describe difficult situations (and your reactions to them) is a favorite tactic of interviewers. It's called behavioral interviewing. Behavioral interview questions get way past your basic skills and qualifications and get to the heart of "how will you act once you're hired?" Past behavior predicts future behavior better than anything else.

The reason you have to be able to speak to this issue in an interview is that they want to know if you're going to freak out when they have a rough time. And everyone eventually has a rough time. Accountants tend to get swamped in March, and retailers do at Christmas. Those are both big stress times for those professions. But even jobs without a seasonal aspect to it like those can have times when the workload is particularly stressful.

Describing a time when your workload was particularly heavy and how you handled it is a great view into how you approach day-to-day problems.

They want to know that you can handle your workload changing. Can you adapt? Basically, they want you to show them the tools or the process you'd use to handle that situation. So, you walk them



through it.

You should say something like, “We all have times when our workloads become heavier than they normally are. I’ve found that the best thing to do is to take a look at what I have to do and prioritize tasks. What I’ve found is that not everything has to be done immediately. Some things are more mission-critical than others, and in times of stress you have to be able to prioritize.”

And then you tell a short story that reflects your experience in prioritizing tasks in high-stress situations. (Use the STAR technique.)

Or you’d say something like, “In those situations, I take a look at what the workload is and prioritize critical tasks. I speak with my supervisor to see if there’s a need for help in prioritizing from his point of view and execute. Just taking that look at it helps me feel less stressed and more in control.”

And then you can tell a story about providing assistance to your boss on a critical task.

I think that either one of those are a much better answer than, “I stayed until the work was done.” Many people give an answer that focuses on the long hours they worked on a project because they want that employer to know they work hard, but I think it’s even more important for that employer to know that you can work smart.

I’m not saying don’t talk about getting things done. Of course, talk about your follow-through and your dedication. But take them through your thought process of how you approach a problem and think critically about it and make great decisions that will benefit the company. It will make you stand out from other candidates and be very impressive to your future boss.

Job Interview Question 5

Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.

Job interviews are like very intense speed dating. They've got to get to know you well in a very short time. For many companies, talking about your resume and what you've done is just not enough. They need to know how you'll behave on the job, how you'll react to situations. To get to the meat of those issues, they use behavioral interviewing. You must know how to answer behavioral interview questions before you go into your next job interview.

This question, asking you to describe how you'd handle a "too much to do and not enough time to do it" situation on the job is a classic BEI (Behavioral Event Interview) question. Who HASN'T had to deal with a day like that on the job?

You don't have to get into specifics here... what they want to know is how you THINK. How do you approach problems? What tools or strategies do you use to approach and solve challenges in your daily life on the job?



With this question, it all comes down to prioritization: How do you prioritize tasks? CAN you prioritize tasks? They don't want someone who's going to collapse into a "get me to therapy" heap or explode in anger over the issue. And they'll know by your answer. A bad answer would sound like, "I expect my boss to give me a reasonable workload and recognize that not everything can get done." Another bad answer is "I would just until I completed everything, as late as that needed to be." On the surface that sounds good, but in reality, it says nothing about your ability to think on your feet, analyze the situation, and implement a reasonable solution. That's what they want to know.

So walk them through your thought process when you prioritize: Does everything truly have to be done today? Even though you may have 25 tasks, maybe the truth is that the person who wants those done can't really do anything with all of them immediately anyway. Maybe they can only deal with 5 or 10 of them in the next couple of days, so those are the ones you concentrate on first.

Or maybe in your position, you would have people that you could delegate work to. When you talk about how you'd do that, they get a peek into your management style, too.

A lot of people take on tasks and never really take a look at "When does this have to be done?" They just look at the list and pull it onto their plate. That's not strategic thinking.

Show them your strategic thinking abilities and you'll be very impressive in the interview.

Job Interview Question 6

Describe your work style.

Do you know what your work style is? This is a popular interview question, but a lot of people go wrong in their answers because they don't understand what that employer really wants to know. They're not



interested in your personality or your likes and dislikes with this question. (They're not interested in how you dress for work, either.) They want to know how you work.

So some people really shoot themselves in the foot with the 'work style' question because they say things like, "I'm really laid back." First, that's a personality trait. Second, no one wants to hear that. No one wants to pay for your moseying along through your day. They want to get their money's worth out of your salary.

It's not about your personal preferences, either. For instance, some people will say things like, "I'm not a fan of conflict." What's that got to do with your work style? Nothing.

Work style has to do with the work.

First, you want your answer to mesh nicely with the job itself. How does your style fit with that job?

If it's a data-driven role, you don't want to talk about how you like to come up with creative solutions for problems. That's not needed so much in that job. Those are basics.

What they really want to know are things like: Do you like to

work alone, or as part of a team? You may actually prefer one or the other, but you should know what the job requires. Most companies appreciate someone who can do both. Teamwork is important, but sometimes you've got to just saddle up and go it alone. Talk about how you are comfortable with both.

Are you comfortable with minimal direction, or do you need lots of details before you complete a task? I think it's important to be upfront with this one if you really can only function one way. If you hate being micromanaged and your future boss believes in it wholeheartedly, then you are not going to want that job and it won't be a highlight on your resume.

You always want to pick out a few of your best qualities (again, that fit especially well with the job you want) and talk about those: Are you organized? Do you work quickly? Are you a good multi-tasker? Do you enjoy taking on extra projects? Are you a great planner? Are you consistently a top performer?

You can't be all things, but you can successfully approach this question like you do all interview questions: with a strategic answer that thoughtfully addresses the question and provides an answer that meshes your best qualities with the needs of the job.

Job Interview Question-Answer App:



<http://jobinterviewquestionsandanswersapp.com>

<http://careerconfidential.com/training-webinars/>

Job Interview Question 7

Describe yourself to me in one word.

Sometimes job interviewers try to get inside your head. Why? Hiring you feels like a gamble to them. Companies worry about who they're hiring. The person who hires you has a big stake in you doing well on the job.

Remember the 4 basic questions of every interview: Do you understand the job? Can you do the job? Will you do the job? Do you pose a risk to their own continued employment? You pose a real risk to their job if you don't do well. (This is a prime reason why 30-60-90-day plans are such great interview tools—they answer all those questions VERY well.) The end result of all this is that they sometimes ask you weird interview questions like, “Describe yourself to me in one word.”

This is a tough one. My personal answer would be “dynamic,” because I change, I adapt, I do whatever I need to do to succeed. That's a good, all-purpose word that could apply to many different jobs.



But I don't want you to think only about a word that describes you. That could lead you down the path to picking something like

“happy” or “resilient” that might describe you very well but doesn’t speak to the job at all.

As in all things in the job search and interview process, I want you to be strategic. Every part of the process is a step that needs to lead you to your ultimate goal—the job offer. Be mindful of all the steps.

Try to think about answering this question not just by thinking about what you are, but by thinking about what you are in relation to the job...what the job requires, what would make someone a standout employee in this position, what you’re going to do for them.

So “bright,” might accurately describe you because you’re smart, but “successful” might mean more to them. (If you’re successful in other areas, you’ll probably be successful for them.)

Responsible, motivated, dedicated, those are all good words. So are: strategic, flexible, creative, dependable, reliable, helpful, fair, honest, focused, steady, organized, enthusiastic, or maybe even valuable.

Bottom line: Think about the job itself and what a fantastic characteristic would be for someone in that role, and tell them the one that applies to you.

But here’s an extra hint: They might not let it go with just your one-word explanation. The follow up might very well be “Really? Can you give me an example?” So have a story that tells about how you embodied that trait at least once in your work life.

Job Interview Question 8

Do you prefer working in a team or alone?

Even though asking if you prefer working independently or as part of a team is a standard job interview question, it's also a bit of a tricky one. I can't think of any job that doesn't at some point require both work styles. So even though you probably do prefer working one way or the other, you will shoot yourself in the foot if you say so. It's better if you are comfortable with both, and very important that you indicate that. But there are subtle distinctions in the wording you use that can make the difference between an adequate answer and a standout answer.



The standard answer that most people give: ‘I work well either way—I’m great as part of a team, and I’m comfortable working alone’ is an OK answer, but you can do better. The way to be strate-

gic about this question is to really know the typical working conditions of the job you're going for and how much of your time will be spent on a team or by yourself. That requires some research on your part—but that kind of job interview prep is an essential part of creating your 30-60-90-day plan, which you should be doing anyway.

If the majority of the time you'll be **working alone**, you can say, "I prefer to work alone, but I find that occasionally working with a team feels creative because we can bounce ideas off each other. I like to learn from other's experiences."

If the majority of the time you'll be **working on a team**, you can say, "I like the dynamics of working in a group, but appreciate sometimes having a part of the project that's my own personal responsibility."

The general idea is to say what you prefer without being negative about the thing you don't.

Maintaining a **positive attitude** is important, and it will make the hiring manager feel good about hiring you. Everyone wants to work with people who are flexible rather than rigid.

But here's **one neat trick**: Instead of just offering an answer, add a question to toss the conversational ball back to them. Say something like, "About how much time do you think will be spent working on my own vs. working with a team in this position?" Or, "Does the corporate culture encourage one style over another?"

Asking questions of your own like this during the course of the interview gains you more information while keeping the tone conversational and helpful.

Job Interview Question 9

Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

Even though a good STAR story is the backbone of answering Behavioral Interview questions, here's one interview question where it's actually a good thing NOT to have a great story for. Asking you for an example of a time when you folded under pressure is a situational interview question that's even worse than "Describe a difficult situation and how you handled it." At least in that one you can come out looking like you've overcome something. In this one, there's not any way to make yourself look good.



Because think about your choices with this question:

Did you not want to conform to the policy because it was unethical—but then you did? You may think of yourself as the martyr in that situation, but you'll just come across as someone who is OK with being unethical. That's not the image you want to project.

Did you not want to conform because you knew best? Saying that you knew more than your previous boss is a bad tactical error

in an interview because then you're badmouthing them—and that's always a no-no. That answer sets you up as an adversary for your future boss even before she hires you—and she won't. Not with that attitude.

The truth is that the vast majority of directives, instructions, etc. at work you just won't be able to have any influence on. The few things that you can influence are still limited. You can try to communicate, grab more information, educate, and so on. But in the end, you're going to have to execute or you might lose your job.

But this question does get asked in interviews, so how do you answer it?

The interview wants to know how you would really react in a difficult situation. What's your communication style? Did you confront your boss? Did you avoid the whole discussion?

Your best answer probably sounds something like, "Sorry, I can't think of a time when that happened." If they press, you might say, "I might ask questions or express concerns over a policy because I believe it's part of my job to support the team and that includes spotting potential issues before they become actual problems...but in the end the decision belongs to my supervisor and I always respect that."

With that answer, you've shown you're a critical thinker, a team player, and respect the chain of command. What potential boss wouldn't be comfortable with that?

Job Interview Question 10

Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.

If you get asked to describe a time you went above and beyond the call of duty on the job, be thrilled because this is a great behavioral interview question that has the potential to make you look like an amazing candidate.



You should ALWAYS have one of these stories. It's always a great thing to talk about how you not only met, but exceeded the expectations of your employer. That's value.

Before you go into the interview, as part of your job interview prep, think about what story you'd tell in this situation. You should always try to choose one that not only describes a past success but also speaks to your potential success on this job. Good choices would be ones that highlight skills you need on this job or tasks you'll need to accomplish, although stories that highlight good character traits are also helpful. Relate your story to the job you're trying to get in some way.

Your answer or your story should talk about a difficult situation that you overcame in some way. Conflict and resolution always

makes for a good story. And you should always tell it along the lines of “Here was the situation....we needed X done, these were the tasks that needed to be done, these were the actions I took, and these were the results.”

That’s the STAR method. STAR stands for the Situation or Task you faced, the Action you took, and the Results you received. It’s just a process to follow to make sure you get all the necessary elements in your answer. I’ve also seen it called CAR: Circumstance, Action, Result. Same thing.

Do not be afraid to brag. This is your shot. In fact, this is also an excellent time to pop open your brag book and do a little show and tell. Show them the note you got from a customer or your supervisor that congratulated you on a job well done. Show them the graph of the stats that improved dramatically after you took action.

Brag books are excellent communication aids for job interviews. They’re visual, which gives you another interesting element in the interview. Not everyone takes the time to put them together and bring them, so they’ll help you stand out. And they provide powerful evidence that backs up your story: I can do what I say I can do, and here’s proof.”

Combine a great story with the brag book, and you’ve got a solid point in your favor in the interview.

Job Interview Question 11

Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?

Asking about any difficulties with team projects in the past is a great behavioral interview question, and interviewers love to ask it. At some point, everybody's been on a team where someone didn't pull their own weight. Remember group projects in school? And at some point in this job you're applying for, you'll almost certainly be asked to participate in another one. So it's a fair question for them to ask.



You have to be very careful about what you say in responding to this question or you'll sound whiny. It never worked to whine to your teacher, and it's not going to work to whine to your interviewer, either.

When you face this situation at work (or in school), your best bet is to focus on what YOU are supposed to be working on, not what someone else isn't working on. Try to do your job as best you can and support the supervisor in getting the whole job done. Maybe once you get your job done you could help the slacker, but that's a case-by-case decision.

Hopefully, you can truthfully say that you did just that: "I con-

centrated on getting my own work done and then went to ask my supervisor what I could do to help him finish the task.”

You never want to say, “I reported that person to my supervisor” or “I told that person they better step up and get with the rest of the team.” Neither is a great response.

It might be OK to say, “I got my task done and saw that person struggling, and I knew that the team success depended on all of us cooperating and succeeding, so I offered my assistance. John was grateful to get some help, and we’ve had a great relationship ever since, working together on several projects.”

Of course, that’s a very general response. It might be more appropriate for you to be more specific in your story, or it might not.

The bigger thing I want you to see is that you never ever bad-mouth your former supervisor or your former co-worker. That always makes you look unprofessional. And it gives them the (generally accurate) idea that if you’ll say things like that about those people, you’ll say things about them, too when you leave. None of those things are going to earn you points with the interviewer.

Try to always keep your responses positive and focused on how you got the job done. That's great job interview strategy.

Job Interview Question 12

Have you ever had difficulty working with a supervisor or manager?

Bad boss?

When your interviewer asks, “Have you ever had difficulty working with a supervisor or manager?” they’re not really asking about your past supervisors. They’re asking about you. They want to know how YOU are to work with. The answer you choose to give them will tell them more about you than about your previous boss.

So if you launch into a story about how your old boss yelled at everyone or was unreasonable in his or her demands or was a bad manager, the only message they’ll get is that you badmouth people.

If you talk about how your boss accused you of not working hard enough when you clearly did, they’ll assume that you are someone who doesn’t work hard.

If you mention a boss who played favorites, they’ll think you’re a difficult person to work with.

So you have to be very careful about answering this question. Even if you had legitimate complaints about your old boss (and lots of bosses earn every one of those complaints), you can’t say so. It’s never a good idea to badmouth your former boss, for any reason.



If possible, avoid it: “I can’t say that I’ve ever had much trouble working with anyone. I actually appreciate the personality differences I’ve seen in my various supervisors and found that I could learn something from working with each of those styles. It hasn’t been hard for me to adapt to working with anyone.”

If you can’t avoid it, tell them the story along with your thought process. But keep in mind that any story you tell should be the Disney version: positive, and with a happy ending. For example, you could say something like, “I did get off to a bad start with my manager in my very first job because we had different expectations and at the time, I didn’t know enough to ask about those before I started work. But I got some very good advice to go talk with him about it, and we cleared the air. It turned out to be a great experience for me, and it was a good lesson to take forward in my career. Good communication is essential to a productive working relationship.”

See? You haven’t said anything negative about yourself or about your manager. It was the situation that was difficult. You took proactive steps to resolve it in a mature fashion, and the end result was a productive relationship. (By the way, that’s a STAR structure: Situation or Task, Action, and Result. It’s a great way to tell a story. Check out my [Behavioral Interview podcast](#) for 10 minutes worth of tips on how to answer behavioral interview questions:

<http://careerconfidential.com/behavioral-interview-podcast-product-reviews/>)

Keep your answer positive, show them how you think, and add one more point to the plus column for hiring you.

Job Interview Question 13

How can you apply your specific skills to help the organization achieve sustainable growth and generate revenue?

To answer this question, it's very important that you understand the role you're applying to fill.

If they ask you in the interview how you can apply your skills in "X, Y, and Z" to help the organization achieve growth and generate revenue, you're probably interviewing for a higher-level position. At that level, you should be very clear and very specific on how you can help. What benefits do you bring to the table? Why should they hire you over someone

else? If you can name 3-4 ways in which you would benefit the company in achieving those twin goals of growth and revenue, you're in good shape.

That means that you better have expended considerable effort to company and the position before your interview. And you've moved into bonus territory if you've put that into a 30-60-90-day plan to show them how you plan to get started achieving success for them. There are lots of reasons why 30/60/90-day plans help you stand out, and this is a big one.



But the truth is, this question about growth and revenue is important to answer for every position. Every position has financial value for the company, or it wouldn't exist. There's really only one purpose or mission for every job, and that's to make the company money—either directly or as a supportive role. Every role contributes to the bottom line.

Even the janitor does his part by keeping the place spic-and-span so that customers enjoy and feel comfortable in that space (increasing revenue) and so that workplace accidents are kept to a minimum (reducing costs).

A waitress does not just serve food. She's the face of the company that owns the restaurant. She directly affects the customer's image and opinion of the business, and whether or not they come back.

I was once asked by someone trying to stump me, "What about the person who puts the screws into the plane?" To them, that person was the lowest on the totem pole. In reality, that person is crucial to the success of the business. No one wants a plane falling apart in the sky, do they? That would definitely be bad for business.

So what does the role you're applying for do for that business? How will your skills contribute to the growth of the business and generate more revenue?

If you understand how your job fits into the bigger picture goals and can show the interviewer how your skills contribute to those goals, you're going to do very well.

Job Interview Question 14

How did you deal with the situation the last time your boss chastised you or strongly disagreed with a statement, a plan or a decision you made?

Disagree with your boss?

There are a lot of potential landmines lurking in this behavioral interview question.

Maybe your knee-jerk reaction would be to say, “Why, I don’t recall that ever happening and I can’t imagine that it would.” Why? Are you a yes-man? That’s not a good thing. It could say that you can’t contribute in a way that means anything.

Maybe it did happen and you’re still angry about it because it was unfair and your boss obviously missed his medication that day. Be careful what you say or you’ll end up badmouthing your ex-boss...a no-no in the interview.

Maybe it happened and you’re not upset at all because it happens all the time. To you, you’re a strong, independent go-getter. To them, you look like a loose cannon who can’t be trusted to make decisions on his or her own.

So what do you do? Can you win with your answer to this question? Of course.



First of all, if that ever happens to you at work, you want to make sure that whatever they're chastising you about or disagreeing with you over isn't a simple communication issue.

A lot of times, that's all it is...a communication issue.

Then you want to seek to understand their position on this issue. What's their point of view? How are they coming at this and why? And then you want to see if there is in fact something that you could have done differently. If there is, you want to own that: "I should have done this differently." And in the future, you won't make that mistake again. The biggest thing is seeking to understand, seeing it from the other person's perspective and 'fessing up when you make a mistake.

So if your answer is in fact, "I don't really have a good example of a time that my boss strongly disagreed with something I did," you can say so. Maybe you haven't worked that long, or in more than one or two jobs. But that answer doesn't tell the interviewer much about you, and she really does want to know how you handle conflict. So follow up your answer with a bit of your philosophy on communication: "I try to keep the lines of communication very open so that doesn't happen. But misunderstandings happen, so I would try to see if that was the case first. If I make a mistake, I correct it and take steps to not make the same mistake twice." Or whatever. Now they know that you have a reasonable response to difficult situations.

If you did have a conflict, don't lie and say you didn't. Very few people can lie without triggering a "hmm..." response in the other person's brain. They might not even know why they don't trust you, they'll only know that they don't.

Address the past conflict by walking them through your process: you hit it head on. You spoke directly to your boss about the issue, tried to see where he was coming from, and learned X lesson from the conflict. Keep the end result positive. And if you do tell a story about making a mistake, make sure it's clearly a one-time mistake.

"I realized I'd made a mistake because I didn't have all the information. Now I ask a lot more questions before I start a project to

make sure that doesn't happen again. I'm a much better communicator now."

Check out my podcast on [How to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions](#) to get a blueprint for how to deal with these kind of interviews:

<http://careerconfidential.com/behavioral-interview-podcast-product-reviews>

Job Interview Question 15

How do I know you still have the ‘fire in the belly’ to do this job?

If you’re of a ‘certain age’ in the job search, you already know that age is a big issue. It’s a very real obstacle to getting a job. Older workers have a reputation of not being up on the latest technology, not being willing to adapt, not being willing to take orders from younger bosses, and not having the energy or motivation to keep up with a heavy work schedule. That’s what this ‘fire in the belly’ question is really asking: Are you still motivated to work hard?



There are several ways you can answer it.

(1) You can answer it by saying, “I understand that hiring is risky, but one of the ways I can help make you feel better about hiring me and knowing that I am going to come in and do what I say I will do is to have you talk to my references. They’ll tell you that I am what I say I am and I am someone who will exceed your expectations.”

I personally really like this response. Your references are always going to be strong evidence for you and I would use them to bolster my candidacy. Everyone likes a recommendation. Choose the best references you can (past supervisors, if possible) and prep your ref-

erences before the interview and before they're called. (All that means is to give them a heads up that a call is coming and tell them what's going to be the most helpful to talk about.)

(2) You can lean on your past experience. "You know, it's only been 6 months since I won X award for performance." Or, "Since I accomplished Z for my company."

Your brag book would be helpful here, if you've got recent accomplishments to point to.

(3) You can turn it around on them. If that person is the same age as you or older, you can say, "Well, have you lost the fire in your belly? Because I haven't."

This might seem flip at first, but anytime you can point out a way that you're like them, that's a good thing.

(4) You can say, "I absolutely do. It's a new challenge for me that I can't wait to tackle. In fact, I've even put together this 30-60-90-day plan to show you how I intend to be successful as soon as possible. Can we go over it to make sure I've got the details right?"

I'm not sure there is a more definitive answer to the motivation question than a 30-60-90-day plan. Just putting one together takes a lot of work and says very clearly that you care about getting this job and doing it well. Once you start discussing your plan, they will see very clearly that hiring you would be a very smart decision.

Job Interview Question 16

How do you deal with difficult customers?

Dealing with difficult customers is a fact of life for a TON of jobs: sales reps, customer service reps, retail store clerks, receptionists, restaurant waitstaff, and a hundred other service-industry jobs.



The people in those roles are in the front lines. They are the face of their respective companies, and have a tremendous impact on the company's image, which directly affects growth and revenue. You want your answer to make it very clear that you understand how important your role is and you take it very seriously.

You can absolutely tell a story about dealing with a particular difficult customer (what the situation was, how you handled it, what the results were) and if you happen to have a note from that customer or your supervisor in your brag book about the situation, that's even better. There's nothing more powerful than evidence that you can do what you say you can do.

But overall, you need to make sure that your customer service philosophy is clear, so your answer should sound like this: "I deal with difficult customers the same way I deal with easy customers. I want to make sure they have an exceptional experience with my company. I won't let a customer say bad things about us, or things

that aren't accurate, but if we haven't met their expectations, I want to take responsibility for that and see if I can fix it. If I can't fix it, I still want to make the experience as positive as I can by doing something that would make up for the problem—maybe give them their money back, or provide some other benefit so that they exit that situation as happily as possible. I want to treat every customer as well as I'd treat my grandmother. ”

Do you see what this answer does? It lets them know that you take personal responsibility for your customers and their experience with the company. The reputation of the company will not suffer under your watch, because you will do what you need to do to. They can trust you, they can depend on you. It's another selling point in your favor. And exponentially a stronger answer than: “I hand them off to my supervisor. “

Personal responsibility is a character trait in short supply these days, it seems. If your answer to this interview question highlights that quality in you, you will absolutely stand out from the crowd.

Want other ways to show the hiring manager what you'd be like on the job and convince them to hire you? Bring a 30-60-90-day plan to your interview.

Job Interview Question 17

How do you deal with stressful situations?

If I got asked about how I deal with stressful situations, the first thing that would pop into my head is, “You mean like this one?”

As if you didn't know, job interviews are very, very stressful. The way you calm your nerves is by recognizing that it's going to be stressful, preparing for the interview as much as possible, and taking a few deep relaxing breaths before you start.

But now is not the time to make that joke. My philosophy is ‘never let them see you sweat.’

This 'stressful situations' question is a legitimate job interview question. Who doesn't have stress? Every job is going to have some time when you are going to feel overwhelmed and stressed out. They'd like to know that you are going to react in a calm, rational fashion instead of erupting into a temper tantrum, screaming, hiding, or something else that would either alienate your co-workers or be otherwise unproductive. Stress management is a valuable skill.

‘How do you deal with stressful situations’ is a more generalized version of ‘Tell me about a time you found yourself in a stressful situation and how you resolved it.’ Both are behavioral interview questions. If you get the “Tell me about a time...” version, you absolutely should have a story to tell. I always recommend using the



STAR method (Situation or Task, Action, Result) to answer it—it keeps you from rambling off topic and makes sure you hit the most critical aspects of the story.

If you get the more generalized question about dealing with stressful situations, you have a little more leeway to talk about your overall approach to handling stress, but always keep in mind that you're talking about work. Keep it professional and always bring it back to the story (and the accomplishment):

“If a situation seems overwhelming, I mentally break it up into smaller steps, or doable goals, and just focus on reaching each one on the way to accomplishing the larger task. In fact, that’s what I did with XYZ project. We had a major issue with X problem, but I broke it down into ‘what needs to happen first,’ and concentrated on one step at a time. I was able to see more solutions to the larger problem, and in fact, we got the entire project done in record time.”

Or, “I find it best do concentrate on remaining calm, maybe taking a few deep breaths. When I run into a customer who’s upset, it helps them to calm down if I’m calm and we can work together to resolve the situation.”

Above all, choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situation head-on in a productive, positive manner and let nothing stop you from accomplishing your goals.

Job Interview Question 18

How do you evaluate success?

I think the answer to this question has to be related directly to your work. Don't wax philosophical about what success really is, or what a successful life is all about.

If you go into a philosophical explanation, you'll knock yourself out of a job. They don't care that you'll consider yourself truly successful if you have great relationships, or if you are able to retire to the beach at 60, or anything else relating to your personal life.

Always remember your agenda in a job interview situation: to sell yourself for the job. That hiring manager is your customer, essentially, and you're the product. You need to know what that customer's problems and needs are (that's why you do your interview prep ahead of time and ask questions in the interview) and your entire conversation needs to be about how you (as the product) meet those needs better than any other product out there...and in some ways, exceed them. (It's like the 'bells and whistles' on a product. What are the extras that you bring to the table that make you unique or even more valuable to the company?)

For this situation, success is based on the goals you've set for yourself, the progress you make in achieving those goals, and how



happy you make those who you work for with you. It's based on achieving objectives and satisfying the people who are paying you for work.

So a general answer might sound like: "I evaluate success based on meeting the goals set by my supervisors, how quickly I accomplish those goals, and the feedback I get based on my performance."

Or, "Success means finishing a project on time, under budget, and to the complete satisfaction of the 'customer' of that project." (This could be your supervisor, the person you built a house for / made a part for / created a marketing campaign for / etc.)

If you're in a management role, you might say, "I evaluate success based on meeting my professional goals while ensuring that everyone on my team is working both individually and together smoothly and in peak form."

You can talk about customer satisfaction, increasing revenue, gaining more customers, improving accuracy, or any other business-growth or revenue related goal.

And you can certainly mention a few things, and then toss it back to the interviewer: "How is performance evaluated here?" Getting some details about how THEY evaluate success (their performance methods) will help you hone your answers for the rest of the conversation.

Job Interview Question 19

How do you handle stress and pressure on the job?

Hmmm....how DO you handle on-the-job pressure?

- (a) I cry, yell, or complain.
- (b) I hide in the bathroom.
- (c) I love stress! It's so motivating!
- (d) I don't get stressed.

Obviously, they want your answer to be (c) or (d)...either one works. Either you get some kind of adrenaline high off of the pressure and perform better, or you maintain a Zen-like calm and don't ever get stressed out.



And of course, everyone knows that those are the preferred answers to this particular question, so if you say one of them without really meaning it, you run the risk of sounding fake. (It's a little like saying "I'm such a perfectionist" in answer to the 'what's your greatest weakness' question.)

If you really can honestly say that deadlines motivate you to work harder, then go for it...especially if deadlines are a big part of your job. That's a great thing, and some people really do work well under pressure.

If you've learned to take a deep breath and focus on the task at hand, then talk about that. (Although that may apply only to sur-

geons and bomb squad personnel.)

What you can do to answer this in an honest, authentic way while still making them feel great about what you say is to talk about how you have learned to deal with the stress of the job.

Maybe when the job becomes extra stressful, you prioritize tasks so that it's manageable.

Maybe you can say that you've learned how to harness the energy from the pressure and make it work for you.

However you answer, follow it up with an example of how you've dealt with a stressful or pressure-filled situation in a previous jobs or other situation (certain volunteer experiences can be pressurized, too).

All jobs can, at one point or another, be stressful. Retailers get stressed out during the holiday season, accountants get buried during tax season, project managers run into people who aren't cooperating with their timelines, plans get sidetracked, customers get cranky, and shipments don't arrive on time.

Because stress is everywhere, you always want to have an answer to this question in your back pocket. You always want to answer the question positively, one way or another. Think about what desirable qualities are for top performers in your area and consider how you exemplify those qualities. And tell a quick story that provides evidence of what you say to hammer the point home. It's all part of your job interview strategy.

Job Interview Question 20

How do you rate yourself as a professional?

There are people who will tell you that your automatic response to rating yourself (on a scale of 1 to 10) should be “11”. They say that anything less would be admitting a weakness. I don’t agree. An over-the-top answer like that is bragging, which is a lot different than selling yourself for the job.



I think that if you answer “11,” you’re running a strong risk of coming off as arrogant in the interview, and I don’t know too many hiring managers who relish the thought of hiring someone who thinks they’re more than perfect. It makes for a strained working relationship.

I think that on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, that an answer of 6, 7, or 8 is a reasonable, positive, sincere-sounding answer. It means that you recognize that you have room to grow and develop and become more and better than you are today.

If you’re a young rookie, straight out of school or with only one job under your belt, you should answer 6 or 7.

If you’re anything else, answer 7 or 8.

Only a true Subject Matter Expert with a whole lot of experience should put themselves at a 9 or a 10.

But once you give your answer (and pay attention to the sur-

prise on their faces when you don't give the automatic, knee-jerk, follow-the-crowd response of '11'), offer an explanation of why you rate yourself that way.

Say, "On a scale of 1 to 10, I see 5 as a true average, and a 10 as perfect. I believe I'm better than average, and I don't know that anyone could be a 10, because no one's perfect."

Talk about how you rate yourself based on how others perform in the same roles that you have had.

In every arena, there are 4 or 5 (at least) things that set people apart...what are they in yours? How do you rate in each of those areas?

You really have to know yourself and your 'market' in order to answer this question. If you're in the job search, you better know these things anyway. You can't sell yourself for the job otherwise. And it makes it pretty hard to negotiate salary unless you know what you're worth.

If you can answer this question with a sincere, honest, reasoned response, you're going to stand out from the other candidates and earn big points with the interviewer.

(Or, you could skip the whole ratings question and let your 30 60 90 day plan answer the question for you...they'll rate you a 15.)

Job Interview Question 21

How does this position fit in with the career path you envision for yourself?

I think a lot of people shoot themselves in the foot with this career question.

To be fair, it is a hard question to answer, like “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?” or “What are your long-term goals?” Unless you’re a person who has their life planned out, it’s hard to predict what you’ll want to be doing that far down the road. Especially if you’re just starting out and still learning what jobs you love and what jobs you could do without.

But.

Employers like to see people who don’t just float along with the tide. What’s going to motivate you to do a great job for them (besides the paycheck)? What’s going to make you want to do more, be better, take on new tasks, achieve? Do you have vision? Can you plan?

And, your answer tells the interviewer whether you want just any job or whether you’re interested in THIS job.

That’s a big part of what they’re asking here: “Why THIS job?”

My general response to this question would concentrate on what I’m going to learn from this job:

“I would say that my career path is such that my career serves



me, and I serve my career. I'm looking to grow and become more and contribute more and be more than I am today in my next role. And I know that if I do that I'll be rewarded professionally, personally, and financially. This position fits that for me because it's a growth role that will benefit me professionally because I'm going to be able to learn and develop more skills. As I do well, I'm going to be paid financially and personally in terms of personal satisfaction. It's a stepping stone to the next role. It's an opportunity to hone my skill set. It's an opportunity to learn this particular skill."

If you have a general end destination in mind, that's great. Talk about how this job is going to help you meet that goal. But only in the most general terms: "I plan to add value in this position, develop my skills to help grow the company, and eventually move into roles of greater responsibility." An answer along these lines tells them you're ambitious without any negative side effects, like being a threat to the interviewer's job.

Bottom line: You don't have to have a written-in-stone life plan done to answer this question. You just have to know what you're getting out of this job besides the paycheck.

Job Interview Question 22

How have you responded to a colleague who is putting you down at work?

This is a pretty specific question, but it's basically just another version of "How do you react in difficult situations?" This type of question is often asked in one version or another in behavioral interview situations. Employers want to get a sense of your judgment and decision-making abilities. Your answer here gives them a good idea of how you react to stress.



However, this really is a very specific question, and you have to answer it as it's asked. In this case, it's very possible that you just haven't had that happen. So if it's true, it's OK to say, "I'm glad to say that I haven't had that happen."

I've never had someone put me down. I've had someone criticize me to my boss, and he was in a larger role than me, so that was bad. But my boss saw his criticism as a weakness on his part because she saw that I was a threat to him. Even though she told me about the criticism and suggested ways I could be less threatening to him, I didn't do anything different except try not to step on his toes. I certainly didn't call him on the carpet. It wouldn't have been productive.

In some cases, maybe it would be productive to speak directly

to that person and help them see how it's not only damaging to you, it's damaging to them (as it was to the person who criticized me).

You could also talk to your superior, but when you do that you're admitting that you can't handle a difficult situation on your own.

In some companies, people file complaints with Human Resources, but I don't think it's a good career move. Again, it's saying that you can't handle things on your own.

If you haven't had this happen, just say so and don't spend time talking about what you might do in that situation. You always have to think strategically in an interview situation, and wandering down paths of "what if" is not going to be a benefit to you.

If you have had this happen, it's important that you frame your answer in a positive fashion. Don't tell the story about how you went to HR. Don't tell the story about how you reported them to your boss. Don't talk about what a jerk that person was and how glad you are that in this job, you won't have to deal with them anymore. You don't ever want to concentrate on the negative in your interview answers, because it just reflects badly on you.

Tell a story that says, "I'm a capable professional with good judgment and the ability to handle difficult situations on my own and get to a positive outcome."

Job Interview Question 23

How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?

I love, love, love this question. This is a ‘roll out the red carpet, here’s your golden ticket’ opening to introducing your 30-60-90-day plan.

If you’ve never heard of a 30 60 90 day plan, it’s very simple: it’s a strategic plan for what actions you will take in your first 3 months on the job to ensure a successful transition from brand-new employee to fully-functioning, productive leader or member of the team. The first month usually requires some training, some getting to know the company’s procedures and systems, and by the



third month you should be at the point where you’re initiating at least a few projects, sales, policies, etc. on your own. The more specific it is in the details to the company you’re interviewing with, the better.

Why do I think these are so great?

First, the research required to create a good plan automatically makes you a very well-prepared, knowledgeable candidate. That’s impressive. It’s very obvious that you know what you’re doing—even if you’ve never done that job before.

Second, they demonstrate all those character traits that hiring managers look for but that are very hard to pin down: enthusiasm,

drive, initiative, personal responsibility, goal-setting, and much more.

Third, as you go through the plan with your future supervisor, he or she begins to visualize you in the job. Once they can “see” it, they’re much more likely to offer you the job.

I’ve seen these plans get offers for people on the spot, I’ve seen them get offers for people that were above what they interviewed for in the first place, and I’ve seen them get offers for candidates who were less qualified than their competitors. If there ever were a job interview miracle tool, this would be it.

So...create your own 30/60/90-day plan for your next interview.

And when the interviewer says, “How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?” you’re not stuck with responding, “I don’t know...6 months to a year?” or, “Well, I’d really have to get settled in to see, but I would hope to start making real progress soon.”

Instead, you could say, “I’m so glad you asked. I’ve thought about that quite a bit, and I’ve put together a preliminary plan for what I could do to get rolling as fast as possible. Can I get your input on it?”

When they say “yes,” you walk them through your very detailed plan for success and get their feedback. Even if you don’t have all the details right, the conversation you’ll have will, without a doubt, be the best interview you’ve ever had.

Job Interview Question 24

How long would you plan to stay with us?

Asking about your future plans in this way is really not asking you about your future plans. You don't have to go into your 5-year plan or your career goals. It's a brief question that requires only a brief answer.

Personally, my response to that question would be "How long would you like me to stay?"

Another great response might sound something like this: "I plan to stay as long as I can. I don't want to change jobs if I can avoid it. I understand that there are learning curves to deal with, and that the grass isn't always greener and all that, but there's also something to be said for history and being able to rely on people."

For some people, this question is a beautiful thing. If you've worked somewhere for a long time, then you can say, "I stayed at my last job for 14 years. Do you think I'll be able to stay that long here?"

But if you have "short-gevity" rather than longevity, you might have to help them understand why you haven't stayed long at the other jobs, IF it puts you in a positive light.



Maybe there was a layoff situation (see this video for how to explain a layoff) or a reduction-in-force that was just a matter of “first in, first out” and had nothing to do with you or your performance. You can say that you would never have left that job.

Maybe you just outgrew your job. It was a small company, or there was just no place for you to go with your new skill set so you had to look outside the company. Everyone understands the desire to improve and grow and accomplish.

Either of those explanations is really something that’s out of your control, so they don’t reflect negatively on you.

But what if you don’t have a nice convenient excuse? Maybe you have to do a little confessing: “I made a mistake. I left too soon and I will never make that mistake again. I understand now that just because the grass looks greener, doesn’t mean that it is.” It’s OK to admit that you made a mistake and that you learned your lesson.

Hiring you is an investment for the company. They end up spending a lot of time and money in the hiring process, training you, getting you settled in. It takes time to get someone up to full-capacity. They’d rather you not work for a few months and then take off for greener pastures. Eliminate that doubt with your answer and call it good.

Job Interview Question 25

How much money did / do you make?

Here's a question guaranteed to make you uncomfortable in the job interview process. It's one of the big hot-potato questions. No one wants to say a number first. But you don't have to feel pressured or stressed. There are some great ways to handle this question.



In general, for all salary issues that crop up before you have an offer in your hand, your first goal should be to deflect. Try to avoid talking about money for as long as you possibly can. (That's why you never, ever bring up money questions yourself.) You want them to fall in love with you before you start talking about commitment. Your bargaining position will be much stronger when they decide they want you to work for them. It will be easier to negotiate salary and ask for what you want.

If you can't deflect, there are a couple of ways you can go:

(1) You can go ahead and tell them how much you make because it's not relevant to this job.

(2) You can refuse to tell them how much you make because it's not relevant to this job.

In both cases, the reason it's not relevant is that it's probably a pretty good bet that this job has different (probably greater) re-

sponsibilities than your last one. So it's easy to make the case that what you made in your last job doesn't matter so much, because this job is different.

In my personal opinion, it's not a big deal to tell them how much you made in your last job. In my experience as a recruiter, most companies have a salary range for the position and they won't make an offer outside of that range. They're asking the question because they just want to make sure they can afford you.

This is where doing your homework will pay off for you, too. Your research will tell you what a reasonable pay range is for that position, in that part of the country. You can easily find out what they should be offering you for this job. If they do try to lowball you, you'll know it and can negotiate...after you have the offer in your hand.

If you feel strongly about not revealing what you make (and many people do), you can absolutely say, "My previous position doesn't really relate to this one, so I'm not comfortable discussing my past salary. But I really want to answer any questions about my skills or qualifications to see if we can agree that I'm the right person for the job, and I'm sure that if we do, we'll be able to come to an agreement on compensation, too. I'm really excited about the possibility of working here."

Or you could turn it around on them: "What is the salary range you're offering for this position?" When they tell you, say "I'm completely comfortable with that range. If I'm offered a salary within that range, I won't turn the offer down because of the money."

But please remember that every situation, every interview is different. A negotiation is a dance, not a step-by-step formula. You've got to take the temperature of your own situation and see what you think you can manage doing. But the more you research ahead of time, the better off you'll be.

Job Interview Question 26

How was your working relationship with your previous supervisor?

How was your working relationship with your last boss? This is an attitude question for sure. They don't really care about your last boss, they care about you. Hiring managers know that past behavior predicts future performance, so they are very interested



in your answer. Are you going to trash your old boss? Are you going to complain about how you were misunderstood? Or are you going to talk about how much you learned?

This is a pretty standard job interview question, so make sure you're ready for it.

Hopefully, this is an easy one because you got along great. Even if that's true, it's important that you elaborate a little bit on what you learned from that person that will help you succeed in this new job. The hiring manager doesn't want to only hear, "Great!"

Your being 'coachable' is a big deal to your future manager. They want someone who is willing to learn and who can take criticism and improve.

Even if you didn't get along so well with your last boss, it's important to try to keep this answer positive without lying about it.

You should never out and out lie—first, it’s just not a good thing and second, very few people can lie without setting off some signal you're lying in the hiring manager’s subconscious mind.

Think about the positive things you learned from that relationship and talk about that. There’s got to be something. Any kind of negativity from you in the interview only reflects badly on YOU. It makes you look like a whiner or complainer. But you can sort of turn lemons into lemonade.

If there was a real personality clash, you can say, “Our personalities were very different, so at times it was difficult for me, but it taught me a lot about how to adapt to another person’s work style and made me a more well-rounded person.”

You might have to ponder that for a while to be able to come up with something positive if you worked for the Boss from Hell, but it’s worth it. Being able to maintain a positive outlook and response even in the face of a difficult or stressful job situation is a huge plus for you.

And always remember that your focus is to sell yourself for this job, so try to bring it back around to how what you learned at that job from that boss will contribute to your success in this one.

If you do have a difficult situation you can't think of a way to talk about positively, consider hiring a career coach to help you.

Job Interview Question 27

How would you feel about working for someone who knows less than you?

It's not ideal to work for someone who does, in fact, know less than you. In fact, it's kind of aggravating. But typically, they don't know less than you in all areas. There is usually a reason they are where they are.



They must know more than you in at least one little area, or they wouldn't be the person in charge. Right?

Even if you can't learn something from them (because for some reason they're The Anointed One), then help them be successful. Because if you help them be successful, typically they will help you be successful. But I digress...

The real crux of the issue this question tries to get at is this: Do you understand that there are people who know more than you and you can learn something from them?

There are some personality types this is a big issue for, but typically the folks who have a problem with this are older employees, the Over-50 crowd, who don't think they can learn anything from some young whippersnapper. If you're an older worker, you have to be aware of this stereotype and be careful of what you say in the interview. If you talk critically about the 'younger generation,' or tell a story about some 25-year-old idiot you worked with last, it will just reflect negatively on you. Even if he was an idiot.

This interview question is poking around for your sore spot. (It's similar to the 'how do you handle stressful situations' question.) They're looking for negativity. Are you going to be negative? I hope not.

In some jobs, you are going to go in and work for someone who's younger than you. For some people, that's no big deal and you can tell it's no big deal when you talk to them about it in the interview.

They say things like, "I usually find that even if someone knows less than me in one area, they know more than me in another one. I can learn something useful from just about everyone and I enjoy the process."

For others, who use that snarky tone and say things like "It can be aggravating, but I try to teach them what I know without being too threatening" or something similar that sounds positive but really isn't, what flashes through the interviewer's mind is, "My gosh, I'd hate to be the one managing this person because they are trouble." And your job offer disappears, just like that.

Job Interview Question 28

How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?

The best way to go about establishing credibility with anybody in any situation is to ask really great questions and try to understand the situation before trying to do any kind of magic trick.



(Incidentally, this is another benefit of asking questions in the interview...you show what you know by what you ask. If you ask great questions, it helps establish your own credibility as a strong candidate with the interviewer.)

A lot of people think you should jump on the white horse and charge in immediately with a quick, decisive fix, and that's not what's necessary in most cases. You can do more harm than good that way, and make a lot of people angry in the process with your arrogance and inevitable mistakes. What's necessary is to ask the questions that reveal that you do understand the situation. Then you can make a stronger decision based on the evidence, rather than a knee-jerk reaction.

In other situations, the best way to establish credibility is just to buckle down and do your job as best you can as soon as possible. Actions speak louder than words.

For those reasons, this question is a FANTASTIC opening to show the interviewer your 30/60/90-day plan. You just have to say, “I think I can answer that question best with this: I put together an outline of what I hope to take action on and accomplish in my first 3 months on the job and I’d like to talk it over with you.” And you bring out your plan and go over it with the hiring manager.

In case you’re not familiar, a 30-60-90-day plan is a written outline of the primary actions you would take during your first 3 months on the job. You research the company and the job extensively to put one together, because the more specific the plan, the better off you are. The research helps make you the best-prepared, most knowledgeable candidate, and helps you create a better, more accurate plan. Your plan shows that you are very capable of doing the job, even if you have little to no experience. It shows that you’re willing to go above and beyond, if necessary, and it shows that you’re a strategic thinker, that you can analyze a situation and prioritize tasks.

Both the plan and the discussion of it that you have with the hiring manager show that you would buckle down and execute on those things that would help you establish credibility and be a productive member or leader of the team.

Job Interview Question 29

I noticed that you are applying for a position that is not as senior as your past positions.

Why would you consider a job that is, in effect, a demotion for you?

This is a question you might get asked early on in the process, like in a phone interview. If you have a lot of experience, it's going to be obvious that you're overqualified. So the question is, 'Why would you take a job that's less than what you're qualified for?'



There can be a whole host of reasons you can cite...as long as you never, ever say anything that sounds like, "Because I've been out of work for so long that if I don't get a job soon, I'm going to lose my house." Even if it's true.

That's clearly one of the big things they're worried about when they ask you this question. They're worried that you just want A job, not THIS job, and that as soon as something better comes along, you're gone. Or they're worried that you'll be bored. The job won't be a good fit and you won't be happy...which means that eventually, you'll jump ship. And all the money they've invested in hiring and training you is gone, too.

They want to know that the job is going to be a good fit for you.

Even though taking a job that's considered a step backward in your career is considered to be a little unusual in our super-competitive society, there are plenty of reasons you might want to do it.

Maybe it's a shorter commute. Maybe you tried working in management but what you really enjoy is the hands-on work of your industry. Maybe you just really like this company or the product they make. Maybe there's some experience you can get in this job that you can't get anywhere else. Maybe the culture at this company is a better fit for you. Maybe there are growth opportunities at this company that you can't get at your old one (because that was a small company and this is a big one with lots of room to advance).

Since those reasons aren't readily apparent to others, you'll have to explain. Communicate to the hiring manager why this position at this company is a perfect fit for you.

And then point out that the fact that you're a little overqualified for this job is actually a bonus for them because they're getting someone with lots of experience. In this situation, you almost certainly have more experience than the other candidates and that's a big plus for them. It's another selling point for you, and you should help them to recognize it.

Job Interview Question 30

If we hire you, what will we know about you a year down the road?

Some candidates might wander off the path they should be on with this question (as many do with “Tell me about yourself”) and start talking about how they’ll know you like football, that you make a mean cheese dip, or that you never take sick days.



Stay on track and use this question just like you do all the other ones to sell yourself for the job. All your answers to interview questions should be strategically focused on getting you one step closer to the offer. Always be thinking: “How will this answer tell them something relevant about me and how I am perfect for this job?” “How will this answer make them want me more?” Strategically approaching the interview works.

This question helps you paint a brief picture of what life would look like with you in that role. If they can visualize it, you’re one step closer to getting the job. It’s just like thinking about how a couch will look in your living room or how a car will look in your driveway. The more you think about whatever that is fitting into your life, the easier it is to say ‘yes’ to the sale. In this case, it’s the job offer. Incidentally, that’s one of the reasons 30/60/90-day plans

are so fantastic. They help that hiring manager ‘see’ you in the job.

I personally think that the very best answer to this interview question is:

“If you hire me, a year from now you’ll know that everything I’ve said to you in this interview is true.”

Want to elaborate a bit on that? Say:

“You’ll know and understand why everyone in the past has enjoyed and appreciated my work and would like to have me work for them again.” (References are an amazingly effective resource for you and you should always make sure yours are prepared for a phone call about this opportunity.)

Or,

“You’ll know that I’m sincere when I say that I’m excited about learning more about this job and this company, and thriving and contributing and producing and wanting to do more and help you guys with [insert job responsibility here].”

Or (if you want something more specific),

“You’ll know that my skills in X, Y, and Z were a perfect fit for this position based on the results I got from _____ / the solution I came up with for _____.”

This question is really just another version of “Why should we hire you?” You want them to know that you’re going to meet, and even exceed their expectations of you.

Job Interview Question 31

If you could be any animal, which one would you be and why?

Some hiring managers really like these oddball interview questions. Some think it's going to reveal more about your character, and others just want to know what you really act like when you're under stress or just thrown a curve ball. Questions like these do



reveal your thought process and offer you a chance to show off your creativity and inventiveness.

As in all job interview situations, your best bet is to be prepared for anything. Thinking long and hard about the qualities that are necessary to do a job well is actually an excellent exercise to go through before an interview, because it can help you focus your thoughts for how to answer all the interview questions you'll be asked. How does your personality, your background, your experience, or your skill set meet or exceed what this job requires?

For this particular question, it doesn't matter a lot what animal you choose, as long as you can tie it into qualities necessary to perform the job well. Although I would generally stay away from animals that have negative associations, like snakes, hyenas, rats, or chickens. Or spiders.

What are the personality traits that are desirable for someone who's going to fill this role?

Just smile and keep your answer simple and brief. Name the animal, and then explain why. Give one or two qualities that you see in that animal that also describe you.

I have a friend who says you should always try to be like an eagle, which is great if you're a CEO, but that's a bad animal to be if you need to be a team player.

A horse is really strong...able to function alone well or as part of a team.

Ants are hard workers, and the ultimate team player.

Monkeys are quick learners.

An elephant is strong, intelligent, loyal to the group, and unstoppable.

A dolphin is also intelligent, and actually considered one of the smartest animals.

Dogs are seen as Man's Best Friend, so might be good for someone in a support role. With a dog, you get loyalty and friendliness. Also protectiveness, but that's probably only required for bodyguards.

(Sorry, cat lovers. A cat's independence might appeal to you, but they have a bad reputation for not giving a darn about you as long as you're feeding it. That says, "I'm just here to collect my paycheck.")

A fun way to end this discussion is to say, "What animal did you choose when they asked you this question in your interview?"

Job Interview Question 32

If you could relive the last 10 years of your life, what would you do differently?

Hmmm...what would I do differently?

I wouldn't speed when I was going to get a ticket...

I wouldn't have invested money in those stocks...

I wouldn't have bought those shoes...



Maybe those kinds of things are what come to your mind when you're asked about what you would do differently, but when they ask you that question in a job interview, that's not quite what they mean.

This is another way to ask the 'weakness' question. They're looking for your flaws.

If there is an actual problem or issue in your work history that's obvious (or going to be obvious soon), this is an ideal time to address that situation.

Let's say you took a job and you got laid off...maybe that's why they're asking that question because they see that short-lived role on your resume and this is a way they ask about it without asking directly. You can say, "Well, I regret quitting X job to take Y one. It didn't turn out to be a great move for me. Even though I learned a lot from it and I can see the positives in what I learned from that situation, that would be one that I would change if I could turn back the clock. It wasn't the best decision...but it was the best decision I could have made with the information I had at the time. Hindsight

is 20/20, isn't it?"

You can't hide all your issues, but you can frame them in a way that seems more positive. You can tell your story as you like. (As long as you don't lie...if they find out, you're done.)

If there's no problem and your career's been smooth sailing, then you can be a little more philosophical about this question.

You could try making a deflecting joke: "Gosh, that's a tough one. I know we need to talk about a lot of other things in this interview, so I'm not sure that we have time to go through ALL the things I would do differently..."

If you want to answer it more seriously, say something like:

"If I look at it from a personal perspective, certainly I think we all have moments that we would do differently. But overall, I'm pleased with the direction I've taken, the decisions I've made, and the things that have happened in my career and in my personal life."
"

That's a good, non-personal, neutral answer that should serve you just fine.

Job Interview Question 33

If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?

This is a ‘work style’ type of question. But it’s a complicated one. Employers really want both.

If you’re a big-picture person, they’d like for you to also be able to handle the details. CEOs need to be able to consider the data when they make decisions for long-term plans.

If you’re a detail-oriented person, they’d like for you to also be able to recognize the bigger picture and not get tunnel vision, because you need to be contributing toward the larger goal. Organizations need both styles in order to grow.

So the best answer really is, “I’m a _____, but I can also _____.”

What you say first should absolutely depend on your job...accountants should be detail-oriented, and CEOs should be big-picture strategic types.

“I’m more of a detail-oriented person, but I can step back and look at the bigger picture, just like you step back and look at a map, to make sure that I’m on track for the larger goal.”



“I’m definitely a big-picture person because I think strategically in terms of where the organization needs to be in order to be successful and profitable, but I can focus on whatever necessary details I need to inform those decisions.”

And if you have a good story about a time when you used both skills in a successful project, now would be the time to tell it. “I was the group leader for X project, so I had to keep an eye out for what everyone was doing and make sure we were on track for our goal, and keep a checklist of all the details that needed to be taken care of in order to get there. We completed the project on time with excellent results.” (And say what those results were.)

Big-picture jobs require strategy, creativity, the ability to see the forest and not get caught up in the individual trees. Generally, the higher up you are in an organization, the more you should be able to see the big picture. So if you’re working your way up the ladder into upper management, you should be (or should be learning to be) a big-picture person. Other big picture jobs: consultants, entrepreneurs, writers, counselors.

Detail-oriented jobs are in much greater supply than big-picture jobs. There are always many more soldiers than generals. But as they say, the devil is in the details. You can lose the war for. Many of the highest-paying jobs are incredibly detail-oriented, so it’s a very valuable skill. Detail oriented jobs: engineers, scientists, mathematicians, surgeons, administrative assistants, researchers, just about any kind of technology-based job.

Job Interview Question 34

If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be?

This is definitely a wacky question. Sometimes it's "What animal would you be?" or even "What fruit would you be?" You might think it's ridiculous, but you still have to play along, or you'll upset the interviewer.



They're asking because they want to see what you'll do if they throw you off stride by asking a question out of left field like this, or maybe they want an insight into your personality. This type of question checks your creativity, your ability to think on your feet, and just might reveal what you really think about yourself. (They hope.)

What they DON'T want to hear is, "I would be an apple tree because I like apples." That doesn't tell them anything useful, and it really doesn't have anything to do with the interview or the job.

To answer this question (or any kind of question where you have to choose 'what would you be?'), think in a broad way about the qualities of whatever it is that you're going to pick and how you would explain your choice. What character or personality traits would be useful for someone in that role to have? Think in terms of the utilitarian productiveness of your choice as it relates to the job you're applying for. What does that job require? And then be careful

of the nuances.

For instance, if you were answering the animal question: To you, a cat might seem independent, but one manager told me that to her, they seem lazy. An eagle is always a safe choice for someone who wants to be seen as a leader. Horses are strong, smart and useful. Just don't pick something like an earthworm or a vulture.

If you're answering the tree question, think about how fruit trees are productive, oak trees are strong and reliable, but cottonwood trees spread trash that everyone hates. I wouldn't choose a Weeping willow, because that just seems sad. Sugar maples are productive, too (syrup). Evergreen trees are steady. Palm trees are flexible.

A lot of people go for the oak tree: "I would be an oak tree, because I'm strong and dependable."

If you just can't stand the thought of choosing a tree, you could try saying something like, "I want to be the tree that would be most productive and useful to this organization. That's my goal."

Or maybe you want to research some trees before your next interview.

Job Interview Question 35

Is there anything I haven't told you about the company that you'd like to know?

Toward the end of the interview, hiring managers will ask some version of, "Do you have any questions for me?" Your answer is ALWAYS going to be "yes."



You always want to have a list of questions to ask in the interview. If you don't have any, it makes you look like you're not that interested in the role.

Here are some examples of great questions to ask:

Why is the position open?

Either the person before you failed so miserably at the role they were fired (in which case you want to know so you don't make the same mistakes), or they were so good at it they got promoted (in which case you want to know so you can see what worked and get a head start on being successful yourself). Or maybe the company is growing, so they've created this new role to deal with that. The answer you get will tell you a lot about what's going on.

When do you want to have it filled?

A few candidates will be afraid to ask this question, but don't be. It is not too bold. You're just getting information that will help you be professional in your follow up. After you send your thank you note, you need to know when you should be calling to check on

the status of the job. You need a timeline so you're not left hanging, wondering what's going on. Hopefully, you're following several job leads and have lots of interviews scheduled. You don't want to turn something else down because you're waiting on this one.

How does this role fit as a part of the whole of the company?

This is a great way to find out about advancement opportunities without coming right out and asking about them. And you can find out about what other departments you'll be working with. It might uncover some company culture or organizational issues you need to know before you start.

Where did the person who was in this role before go?

Were they promoted? Where were they promoted to? Is that the advancement track the company generally follows? Do they like to promote from within? All this is great information for you.

Were they fired? Why were they fired? Is there something they did or tried that should be a warning for you?

What is it you like about the company? (Alternative questions: What do you find most impressive about the company? Why do you like working here?)

The answer you get from this question should uncover a lot about the corporate culture, and whether this organization is a good fit for you. It might even uncover some perks that you wouldn't have discovered otherwise....like maybe there's an on-site gym or childcare, or maybe there are stock options you didn't know about that would have an effect on your salary negotiations later.

PS - Really, I hope you ask questions all the way through the interview, as part of a give-and-take conversation. It's more relaxed, it builds better rapport with the interviewer...it's just all-around better for you. 30 60 90 day plans are great tools to facilitate that kind of conversation, help you be more impressive as a candidate, and uncover more information that helps you sell yourself for the job.

Job Interview Question 36

Situational Response Question: An airplane landed in the parking lot. What would you do?

Most situational interview questions are like behavioral questions. They have some direct relation to the job...like, “You are introducing a new policy to the group and facing opposition. How would you handle it?” Or, “How would you handle a situation in which a subordinate was not performing to expectations?”



Others seem like ridiculous, oddball questions that don't have any relevance to the job at all...but what they do for employers is give them a window into how you think. How do you approach a challenging situation? That's why they ask these kinds of questions.

You never know what they might ask, and there's really no way to prepare for them. I've seen some crazy questions like:

How would you move Mount Fuji?

How many light bulbs are in this building?

What are 5 uncommon uses of a brick, not including building, layering, or a paper-weight?

Suppose you had eight identical balls. One of them is slightly heavier and you are given a balance scale. What's the fewest number of times you have to use the scale to find the heavier ball?

If you get asked one of these, just take a deep breath and roll

with it. The trick is to walk them through your thought process. Talk your way through it, showing how you would approach, think about, or strategize about whatever situation they throw at you.

So if I were asked what I would do if an airplane landed in the parking lot, I would say something like:

“I’m not sure I would do anything. If there are a lot of other people around and they look like they know what they’re doing, I think I would stay back and let them handle it. If no one’s hurt, I don’t see that I have to get involved in that at all, except for maybe calling 911.

If someone’s hurt, or there’s the possibility that someone will be hurt, then I would have to execute something very quickly. But what that would be exactly depends on a lot of things: How big is the plane? Where is it? What do I have access to? There would be a lot of questions that would have to be answered before I decided which action would be the most effective to take.”

What I’m doing with this answer is demonstrating that I could evaluate, analyze, and sum up a situation before I decided on which action to take. Immediate, ‘charge in on a white horse’ action is not always the best move. Sometimes it’s more important to stop and create a strategy first.

There’s no really wrong answer to these questions. (Well, maybe to the math-based ones...but I’m assuming that if you get asked a math-based question, you’re in a math-based field, which means you’re equipped to work out the answer to it.) Just take them through your thought process and reason it out. It will be OK.

Job Interview Question 37

Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss about a way that something should be done. How did you handle that?

You can't get away with saying, "That's never happened. I've never disagreed with my boss." Everybody, at some point, has disagreed with a decision the boss made about something. The question-behind-the-



question is, how did you handle it? In this case, they're looking to see that you have good communication skills and an understanding of authority. Can you get a competing idea communicated effectively and respectfully (without being rude or obnoxious)? Can you handle conflict in a professional manner?

You can tell your boss that you disagree about the way something should be, if at the same time you offer suggestions about how something should be handled. I personally think that's always the best way: when you disagree, offer an alternative solution. Don't just complain. But if the boss responds by saying, "I appreciate that, but we're going to go in this direction," then if you want to still continue to be employed, you're going to have to give up. They're the boss. (Unless for some reason, it's incredibly unethical...but in most cases it comes down to a simple matter of 'what the boss says,

goes.')

The story you tell should be an example of how you handle such a situation respectfully, professionally, and with good communication skills (just like if your boss disagrees with you). This is a behavioral interview question, so use the STAR structure (Situation or Task, Action you took, Results you got) to tell your story. Just make sure that it's a story that shines a nice light on you when you're finished telling it. You don't want to tell the story about the time when you disagreed but your boss was being a jerk and you just gave in to keep the peace. And you don't want to tell the one where you realized you were wrong. Tell the one where your actions made a positive difference on the outcome of the situation--whether it was a work-related outcome or a more effective and productive working relationship.

Here is a very general example:

"We were working on a big project for X, and my boss decided that we should take Y action. But I could see where that decision would cause us trouble down the road with A, B, and C. So I went to her, told her my concerns, and offered some alternative ideas [state what those were]. She saw my point and liked that I was thinking outside the box. We implemented my idea and it gave us X results."

Job Interview Question 38

Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult situation with a co-worker.

“Works well with others” is a major skill we’re judged on from kindergarten right on into the workplace. (If only we didn’t get so many ‘opportunities’ to hone that particular skill!) That’s why you get job interview questions about difficulties working with supervisors, difficulties working on team projects, and how you deal with stressful situations. They’re all trying to see if you can get along and be professional (and productive). It’s behavioral that pokes around in your past to help them predict how you’ll behave in the future before they invite you into their environment.



With this question in particular, they’re looking for how you deal with problems and confrontations in general and how you come up with solutions. How do you approach a difficult situation? Do you have good communication skills? Are you empathetic? Do you have emotional? Can you remain calm? Can you find a solution?

You should be quick to point out that, “Hey, I try not to get into difficult situations with co-workers.” Being able to consistently keep the peace is a great skill.

But you're going to have to tell them something. You can choose to talk about a communication issue you worked through, or a professional challenge you overcame with your initiative, resilience and problem-solving skills.

A communication issue answer might sound like this: "But obviously, there are personalities that I don't do as well with. Once when that happened, I just reminded myself that there's a reason they're in that company, that they are a valuable member of the team and I've got to figure out a way to work with them. We had problems because we failed to communicate, which hurt us both. I figured out that I must be causing 50% of that problem, so I thought about what I could do to alleviate that situation. So I came up with X, Y, Z solutions that I could use to address this issue, made sure I wasn't coming at it from a position of negativity, and resolved the problem."

Keep your answer emotion-free (don't vent any feelings here), with a happy ending. They just want to see your thought process. They want to see that you can be empathetic and that you are willing and able to negotiate a situation in a peaceful manner with a good outcome.

Job Interview Question 39

Tell me about a time when you failed.

The key to answering the failure question is that you can't say you've never failed. I know you probably really want to, because you don't want to be seen in a bad light. But you can't. And it's OK.



Everybody fails. If you've never failed, it means you've never taken a risk (which means you probably haven't made much progress, either) or you've never made a big mistake (which is impossible). I've failed lots of times in my career. What's important is that I learn from my failures and I don't make the same mistakes again. And that's what's important for you, too. This is not like the weakness question. A weakness is a flaw in yourself that could affect your work in the future. A failure is a temporary event that doesn't have to happen again, if you are humble enough to learn a lesson from it.

So first, you have to choose a failure, and second, you have to be able to articulate something you've learned from the mistake so you can transform it into a turnaround story with a happy ending. Everybody loves comeback stories, right?

As in: "Once I failed by missing a deadline for a project, but I reacted to that by taking a course to learn my Outlook program in greater detail so that I could use it to keep myself organized and always on time. I've been much more productive since then, so I'm actually kind of glad that happened because I learned a lot from it

and I am providing a greater benefit to my organization.”

Or, you could say: “I am naturally optimistic, which is a great thing for my attitude and my ability to work with people, but once it caused me to overlook a possibility for a problem with my project that turned into an actual problem. I learned from that that I can be optimistic, but I should always have a contingency plan in place. And I do. And actually, it allows me even more peace of mind because I know that I’ve always got a Plan B, just in case.”

Do you see? You admit the failure, tell what you learned from it and what action you took to correct it or avoid it going forward, and show why it has made improvements in you and your work. And always bring it back to your selling points so you can continue to be strategic in your interview answers.

Someone who’s not afraid to admit they made a mistake and is obviously interested in improving themselves and their performance is always going to be attractive to an employer.

Job Interview Question 40

Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?

If you're interviewing for a management-level job, you will almost certainly be asked this question at some point. Nobody likes to give negative feedback,



but if you supervise anyone, it's a necessary evil. Managers have to deliver both positive and negative feedback on almost a daily basis, depending on the size of the company and the group who reports to them.

Since delivering even the most constructive criticism can sometimes be a sensitive matter, it requires some higher-level communication skills to do it well. Your future employer will want to know that you have those communication skills so that you can correct undesirable behavior or actions and still run a smooth ship.

They really want to know that you understand the nuances of this situation: how others might take whatever feedback you're giving them. You have to think about how they might perceive what you're saying, what the impact will be on them, what outcome you want, and what you might need to say to preface what you're telling them in order to get that outcome.

They understand, and I hope you do too, that delivering nega-

tive feedback well is about being a little more aware than just delivering information. It's thinking about how they will react. Will they receive this information well? It's about what you want them to do with the information once they have it, what you want the long-term effect to be. How do you want them to move forward from here?

You always want to make sure that you ask questions that require them to indicate their understanding of what you said so that you can clarify that you communicated what you wanted to communicate.

So I think what they're looking for in this question is that you understand that some situations require sensitivity, thinking it through, following up, and maybe even learning from not doing such a good job of giving that feedback.

Give them an example of a time you had to give someone negative feedback, but only as an illustration of your larger philosophical point of what it takes to deliver negative feedback well in order to get the change you're looking for. Show them that you approach it with forethought and sensitivity and with an eye toward communicating well in a positive manner—even though it's a negative subject.

Job Interview Question 41

Tell me about yourself.

Some people think this is an icebreaker question because it's one of the first questions they ask you in the interview (and because in normal circumstances, it is an icebreaker question). So they answer it like they would in a social situation and say



something along the lines of, “I’ve got 3 kids, I love to run marathons, I’m a Steelers fan”...whatever. That’s a mistake. It’s the wrong response because that’s not what this question is about.

When they say, “Tell me about yourself,” what they really want to know is “Tell me something that will matter to me as I consider you for this job.”

This is a golden opportunity for you to set yourself in their minds as a great candidate. It’s completely open-ended, so you can say anything you want. So think about the job, the job description, and all the research you did before the interview, and put yourself in that hiring manager’s shoes: what is he or she going to be the most impressed by? What is going to get that person’s attention and make them sit up and take notice of you for the rest of the interview?

You might start with your education—what’s your degree? If you had an especially high GPA, you might mention it—but if you didn’t, then don’t. Just talk about your degree. If you did course-

work that is different from your degree but pertains to this job, this is a good time to mention it.

And then go into your background. Just hit the highlights: promotions, awards, or key accomplishments. Not necessarily the things that you're most proud of—the things that this hiring manager for this job will be most impressed with.

This requires some strategic thinking on your part before you get there—but think of it like tailoring your resume. You tailor that to the job before you submit it, right? And you're going to tailor your answer to this question before you give it. Just think: What parts of my story would be on this hiring manager's list of reasons to hire me? That's what being strategic in the interview is all about.

You don't need to talk longer than a minute or so—just deliver a very targeted message that says to that hiring manager: “I am skilled, I have accomplished some great things, and I can bring that to work here for you.”

Job Interview Question 42

Tell me your life story (more of your personal history)

Hiring managers want to find out as much as they can about you in the interview. It's a little bit of a risk management thing. The more they know, the less likely they'll make a mistake by extending you a job offer. But even if they ask you to specifically reveal more of your personal history, it's still very important that you remember that your focus is not to make a new best friend here...it's to get a job.



For that reason, here's how you want to talk about your personal story in the interview:

You need to skim over the childhood portion, even though they've asked you for a personal history, because your childhood is probably not relevant for the work you're going to do at this company.

What you want to do is say something like, "Well, I was born and raised here" or "I'm from X state," or whatever, and then briefly hit on the bumps and lumps: I graduated high school, went to college, received XYZ degree, immediately was offered a position with ABC Company, and moved on to X Company after that.

But here's the part that trips up most people (I find this with my personal coaching clients all the time): They just want to spit out the history, versus "dressing it up" to sell it a little bit.

Many job seekers almost forget that they are SELLING themselves for the job, not just reciting a career history. Dressing up your answer to make you a more attractive candidate is very simple.

Instead of saying, “I spent 5 years in the military,” you could say “I spent 5 years in the military, where I was in a leadership position over 150 soldiers and we executed XYZ.”

Instead of saying, “I was the coach of the Whatever-Whatever,” you could say, “I was the coach of the Whatever-Whatever and I coached them to a ABC championship.”

Instead of saying, “I was a lifeguard in college,” you could talk about how big the pool was, how many people swam there, what your responsibilities were and how you were rewarded for it.

If you were an account executive in a certain role, point out that you were immediately promoted to a higher position because you were one of the top 5 sales reps in the nation.

Don't just say what happened. Elaborate on the things that are important or impressive. Dress it up a bit into ‘selling statements’ that tell them more about you but also sell you for the job. Focus on making what you're saying a positive thing...something that actively contributes to getting you this job.

Job Interview Question 43

Tell us about a failed project.

This is a more specific version of “Tell us about a time when you failed.” This is a big behavioral interview question. Why do hiring managers want so badly to ask about your failures? It’s because we’ve all failed at one time or another and how we deal with it and react to it says a lot about our character and our work ethic. It gives them another perspective on how you deal with stressful situations, too.



Failures are difficult. I’ve had a few of them myself.

Basically, how I feel about a failed project is this: a failed project is never a complete failure because you should have learned something from it that will make you smarter the next time around. As long as you don’t disappoint your customers and your superiors, then having a failure is not necessarily a negative. In fact, failure can be good for us because it means that we’re moving forward, we’re trying. A few lumps and bumps on the way are part of the learning process.

I like Michael Jordan's quote: "I've failed over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed." Michael Jordan failed all over the place, but he's also one of the most successful, most accomplished athletes in the world.

We learn a lot from our failures, and that's what the interviewer wants to know that you know. Did you take responsibility? Did you take what you learned and apply it to being better than you were before?

Choose a failure that you learned something from that made you even better at what you do.

If it were me, I would choose a project that failed because of something like organization or time management rather than something that was a central skill I need for my job. And I would choose something that happened a long time ago. (Which gives me plenty of time to show that I didn't make that mistake again.)

Give them the background of the story (what was the project, what was going on). Tell them what the mistake was and why you made it. And then tell them what you learned and what steps you took to make sure that it never happened again. You failed, you learned, you improved.

I want everything in your interview to be as positive as you can make it, and that means your answer to the failure question, too.

Job Interview Question 44

Tell us about a time that you went against corporate directives. Why? How did it turn out?

I once did a survey of job seekers as part of my mock interview program, asking them to give me actual questions they've been asked in job interviews, and this was one of the responses. I almost couldn't believe it. This is not a normal or typical interview question. To me, this is a little like saying, "Tell me about the last time you shoplifted."



I might have disagreed with my boss a time or two, but I never went against corporate directives, and I hope that you haven't, either. Usually, going against corporate directives means that you don't care that much about your job.

(Side note: Don't say that you might have disagreed with your boss but never gone against corporate directives, like I just said above. The natural follow up question to that is, "Oh, really? When?" They might think to ask about your disagreements with your boss, and they might not. But the general rule I would follow is: On negative questions, don't volunteer more information than what they're asking for.)

If you get ever get asked this question in the interview, you might think that they're asking you to describe your independent,

maverick spirit, but I would beware. Maybe there are some companies where being a maverick is a plus, but I'm not sure that I know who they are. Google's corporate culture is famous for its unorthodox style, but I think that even they would have a problem with someone going directly against Google policies.

It would be a very, very special situation where taking that kind of action would cast you in a positive light with the company (former or prospective). Like maybe some kind of whistleblowing situation. Unless you've got some story about how you saved the company from ruin by going against your evil boss who was bent on destruction, I think I'd pass on answering this question.

I would turn this question (and any other question that seemed overly negative like this one) back to them and say, "I've never gone against corporate directives. Does that happen a lot here in this company? Is that an action that's valued here?"

Maybe you'll get a picture of corporate culture that will either make you think, "Finally...a place for an independent thinker like me!" or will send you running for the hills to get away from what is surely a chaotic environment.

Job Interview Question 45

There's no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?

Let's see....Lake Tahoe, lying on the beach holding a fruity drink with an umbrella in it, riding my horse through the mountains, at the bank counting the millions of dollars I just won in the lottery...all those sound like great places to me.



This is not a typical job interview question. But it's really no more odd than "If you could be any animal, what would you be?" or "If you were a tree, what tree would you be?" Hiring managers ask those kinds of personality questions with dismaying frequency. So why do they ask them? It's because they're trying to get a better idea of who you are. They want insight into your personality and work and they think that maybe you'll let your guard down with this kind of question in a way you wouldn't with something like "What's your greatest weakness?" It's understandable. Their reputation is on the line every time they hire someone. If you're going to be on their team, you're a direct threat to their job if you don't do well. They have a lot at stake.

But you have a lot at stake, too.

Job interviews are hard to come by these days. If you get one, it's a golden opportunity that you HAVE to make the most of. That means that you need to be laser-focused on your goal, which is to

get the job offer. To get the offer, you have to sell yourself as the best person for the job. How do you sell yourself for the job? By answering every single interview question (even weird interview questions like this one) in a positive, focused way that adds yet another layer of reasons to hire you.

If you follow that logic along, that means that the best answer to “If you could be anywhere in the world, where would you be?” is going to sound a lot like this one:

“Right where I’m at. For me, the next step in my life and my career is an opportunity like this. And sitting here with you is the best opportunity for me to make the move into this position. So I can’t imagine that there is anywhere else I would prefer to be right now.”

That’s what I mean when I tell candidates to be strategic in the interview.

Because there IS a wrong answer to that interview question, no matter what they say. And the wrong answer is anything other than “Right here.”

Job Interview Question 46

We are looking for someone with experience...or, You don't have enough experience—why should we hire you?

If you're a new graduate, or if you're switching careers, you might get asked this question, especially early on in the process, like in a phone interview. It is a challenge, but don't let it freak you out. They are at least somewhat interested in you, or they wouldn't have even bothered to talk to you at this point. So keep that in mind and maintain your confidence. They're just a little concerned, but all you have to do is to sort of help them along in their thinking on this issue.



You've got a couple of good options in this situation:

1. Turn the tables on them.

Remind them that at one point, they didn't have any experience either, and someone gave them a chance. Say something like, "Well, at some point, you didn't have any experience either, when you were first starting out. And obviously, you've been very successful. Would you hire you again?"

At this point, they'll be nodding their heads, remembering and agreeing with you—that's always a good thing! This is a very logical thing to bring up, and it gives you a little bit of a psychological edge

in the process.

2. Don't ask about this person's experience (or lack of) directly. Ask about the people they've hired before.

Say, "Of your team, have you ever hired someone who didn't have specific experience in your industry?" They will probably be nodding their heads with you, and you say, "I know there must have been a few times when that didn't work out, but there must also have been some times that it worked out really well."

They're going to say yes, and start telling you about someone who was especially successful even though they didn't have exactly the right education or background or experience. That's your opening. You say, "That's great. I can be that person for you, too. I can take those same skill sets and deliver those same kinds of results." (This is a great time to follow up by showing them your 30-60-90-day plan that spells out for them exactly how you're going to be successful.)

Both of those answers lead that hiring manager around to thinking outside the box a little bit. And you're gaining a psychological edge because you're drawing that connection for them between you and a successful outcome in those reminders of how it's worked out well before.

Keep your confidence, remember that you're a great candidate who learns quickly, and realize that everybody had to start somewhere.

Job Interview Question 47

What are some of your greatest and/or proudest accomplishments?

Doris Lessing 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature

This is a great job interview question, but a lot of people don't do it or themselves justice when they answer it.

One of the worst mistakes people make is that they will say that their greatest or proudest accomplishment is something that matters to them personally, like their two kids. It doesn't matter if your kids are saints who never fight, spend their weekends feeding the poor, and have just won the Nobel prize...that's still the wrong answer.

Being proud of your kids is fantastic. We all love our kids. But that can't be the answer to this.

You've got to remember that you are in a job interview. Good job interview strategy requires that everything you say in the interview must be focused on selling you for the job. That's why you're there.

The answer to this needs to be something that directly relates to the job, like being awarded X prize for achievement after being in a position for only 18 months...or being recognized as the ABC....or figuring out a solution for a big hairy problem that the company had been struggling with for a long time.



It **MUST** be work-related: awards, accomplishments, successes.

If you fail to say something work-related, you could easily lose out to a candidate who is not necessarily a better candidate than you, but who does a better job of focusing themselves on the job at hand rather than on their personality or family.

It's also a mistake to say something work-related that isn't especially relevant for this job. For example, you don't want to tell a story about how you solved a technical problem if you're interviewing for a sales job. Even if it was the most complicated technical problem in the world requiring advanced knowledge and serious expertise, they won't care if what they really want to know is, "Can you make a sale?"

Prepare to answer this question before you get to the interview by thinking about your proudest at work and choosing one that would be especially impressive to this company, for this position. Or, come at it another way and read over the job description and then think about impressive things you've done that match up with at least one of those requirements.

When telling the story of your proudest accomplishment, be strategic and choose an example that directly relates to this job. (At the same time, choose another story to keep in your back pocket to help you answer the "What are your greatest strengths?" question.) In your story, provide details. Try to quantify those accomplishments as much as you can because numbers are impressive as hard evidence. Don't be afraid to brag. That's what this question is for.

Job Interview Question 48

What are your advantages and disadvantages?

This job interview question is another way to get at what your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a candidate are. But in this particular one, they'd like a list of the pros and cons of hiring you. Don't let it throw you. It is a beautiful thing to be the



one in charge of putting together that list (if only during the interview). You can spin this story like a politician and turn it in your favor. Don't lie. Just focus on the positive.

The truth is that they are probably aware of your advantages and disadvantages. They've read your resume. But this is a golden opportunity for you to influence their thinking by addressing any shortcomings in your experience or background while explaining why they don't matter that much. Or look at it another way, and it's an opportunity to show them that your disadvantages or weaknesses (every candidate has them because no one's perfect) aren't relevant or worth even thinking about because your advantages or strengths are so strong that they'd be crazy to pass you up.

Remember that you are selling yourself for this job. You're the "product" that's for sale here. The hiring manager of that company is the customer, and your salary is the cost or the price they will pay for the product. Why are you going to be a great value for them?

Be strategic when answering this question, just as you do for all job interview questions. Answer every question with an eye toward the job description and goals.

Of course, advantages are easy. It's the disadvantages that are going to trip you up. One strategy I like when talking about your disadvantages is using a strength that you could improve on. Another one is using a weakness that either doesn't matter for the job or that helps you with the job.

For instance, if I were asked this question, I'd say that my advantages were that I am intelligent, driven, quick-witted, high-energy, and able to communicate at all levels. Those were all great advantages for me when I was in sales, and also happen to be helpful to me as a career coach and business owner. I communicate very well with an enormous variety of people and can quickly evaluate and analyze what a job seeker's problems are and give them a solution, which saves them time and money.

I would say that my disadvantages are that I'm impatient, I'm not detail-oriented, and I always want to be a leader. (I also don't respond well to authority, but that's not something I would say to someone who was going to be my boss!) But all of these things are problems that either help me do my job well or don't cause me any problems in performance. See, my impatience is something that causes me a problem in my personal life (just ask my husband and kids) but that serves me very well in driving me to achieve quickly at work. When I say I'm not especially detail-oriented, I would also say "and that's why I take the extra steps of X, Y, and Z to address that issue so I don't miss anything." The leadership piece is another thing that sometimes causes me trouble in social situations but is a very desirable quality in my line of work.

You are in charge of how you present yourself as a candidate, and you can tell your own story in a way that shines the most flattering light on you and your candidacy.

Job Interview Question 49

What are your hobbies?

Asking about your hobbies and interests seems like an odd interview question, but companies are asking more and more of those ‘personality’ type questions these days in an effort to make sure that you’re going to be a good cultural fit for the organization. And the indirectness of this question is also sort of a fishing expedition for them to see if you’ll reveal things about yourself that you otherwise wouldn’t.



It’s not an innocuous question. They will read things into your answer, whether you intend for them to or not, and they will be influenced by what you say.

You’ve got a couple of strategic opportunities to take advantage of when answering this question. The first one is making a connection with the interviewer. This is a great place to build rapport. For that reason, stick with talking about hobbies that most people can identify with. (You can’t build rapport if they can’t identify with you.)

So first of all, whatever you do, don’t make the mistake of talking about your crocheting or your ultimate fighting championship! Those both can have negative connotations for various audiences. Crocheting makes you seem ‘older’ and less culturally current, while ultimate fighting will make some hiring managers worry that you

have a violent streak. For example, even though I personally like to shoot my pistol in target practice, there are a few people that would not sit well with, so I wouldn't mention that. Instead, I would choose to talk about another hobby, riding horses.

The second opportunity is a chance to influence how they think of you as a candidate. This is a fantastic place to talk about hobbies that make you look either energetic or smart. Running is good. Hiking or walking are also positive activities. Traveling is always a good one. Reading is great, or any kind of continuing education piece. I always like to hear candidates talk about taking classes to learn something because I think that says something very positive about you, that you're willing to invest in yourself and that you're willing to learn and try new things.

Especially if you're an older candidate, this hobby question can be a strong way for you to communicate that you have a lot of energy or that you're interested in new technology or that you like to learn new things. All of those things go to alleviating any fears they have about your age.

Just remember that even something as small as a hobby can help you build the case for hiring you.

Job Interview Question 50

What are your least favorite things to do in your role as a XXXX?

This is a slightly different version of, “What did you dislike about your previous job?”

They are trying to find out more about you and how you think. If you are transferring roles in more of a lateral move, your answer will tell them about how you will perform in this new job. If you’re making a move up the career ladder, there’s not such a direct correlation, but it will still shed light on you, your performance, and even on how much you understand about this new role.



If you choose an answer that happens to be a central component of this job’s responsibilities, you’ve just shot yourself in the foot. You haven’t done your research, and you clearly don’t understand the job. Make sure you understand the role and choose a ‘least favorite thing’ that will be only a minor, insignificant component of your task list for this new job.

Another option is to try to choose an answer that anyone would choose. That’s an easy way to build rapport and avoid making a mistake with your answer. For instance, a common answer to this question for those in management roles is “I hate firing people.” No one likes to deliver that kind of bad news. But be sure to say that even though you dislike it, you do it when necessary.

Some answers that I might personally give are:

“I really dislike dealing with failings...even though I always say that failure can be helpful, I still don't enjoy it. I don't like dealing with employees who are failing, a project that's failing, or a situation that's failing. Because I hate it so much, I do everything I can to plan and avoid potential problems in the first place. But I understand that some things can't be avoided, and I do enjoy the feeling that I get when we're able to turn around a bad situation into something positive.”

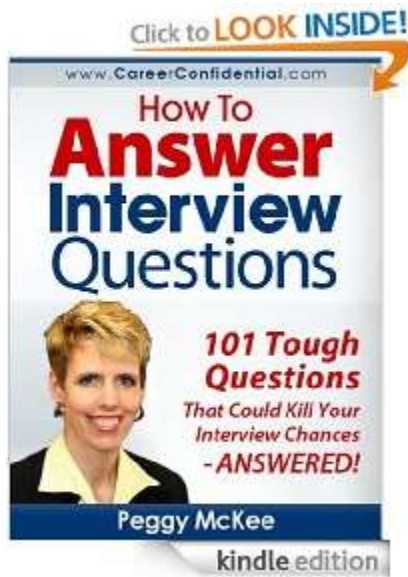
“I don't enjoy paperwork. I enjoy doing things that are going to have a positive impact on my results and performance, but I don't enjoy the monotonous details that are necessary to make that happen in some of those tasks. But I also understand that even if I don't like them, they have to be done. They fall under my job responsibilities. And I'm very driven to make that progress happen, whatever it takes.”

As in answering all job interview questions, be strategic when answering this one. Think about the bigger picture of how you're selling yourself for the job and stay focused on the positive.

Both of these answers are honest, non-cookie-cutter answers that, even though they're answering a negative question, bring the conversation immediately back around to a positive statement about what I will bring to the job.

If you found these 50 Questions helpful, Peggy McKee has continued the list and came up with 101 Tough Questions. You can view the eBook on Amazon at the link:

<http://www.amazon.com/How-Answer-Interview-Questions-ebook/dp/BooAQ4CAFI/>



Additional Resources for You:

- Job Search and Interview Training Webinars
<http://careerconfidential.com/training-webinars/>
- Peggy's Personal Coaching
<http://www.phcconsulting.com/WordPress/interview-coaching/>
- Total Access Club (TAC)
<http://careerconfidential.com/total-access-club-product-reviews/>