

Possible Interview Questions

Not all questions would be asked, it would depend on the job you recently had and the one to which you are applying. But think through all questions JUST IN CASE.

- Tell me about recent work experience and major responsibilities.
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- If there are gaps in your job history, please explain.
- What skills do you bring to this position to make you successful?
- What types of responsibilities do you find most rewarding?
- What types of responsibilities do you find most frustrating?
- Tell me about a tough problem you had to solve, your approach and the outcome.
- Provide a specific occasion when you conformed to policy even though you did not agree with the policy.
- Tell me about a time when your manager was not available and you had to solve an immediate problem. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a project you were responsible for and how you organized the necessary paperwork, tasks, and goals to accomplish your project successfully.
- Tell me about a time when you were late or absent to work. How did you communicate this information to your supervisor?
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake.
- What would your former colleagues say about you?
- How do you deal with difficult or demanding customers?
- Describe a customer complaint you resolved.
- Describe a day when you were faced with multiple interruptions and had to assist in covering an additional position. How did you manage your day to accomplish your work?
- What aspect of your past/current employment did you enjoy the most?
- What skills or qualities are important for dealing effectively with clients? Give me an example of a time when you displayed these skills or qualities.
- Describe how you generally prepared for the busy/peak times on your last/current job.

- Tell me about the methods you use to motivate others. Give me a specific, recent example.
- What is the most important skill in coaching? Give a specific example of how you have applied that skill to help someone improve.
- What are some of your strengths in dealing with people? Tell me about the last time you used one of those strengths to resolve a conflict.
- Describe the most difficult one-on-one meeting you have had with a direct report. Why was it difficult? What did you do?

Don't ignore the need to account for your time. If you've been out of work for a year, an employer (and even networking contacts) will want to know how you've spent your time. "Uh, looking for a job" or "Pounding the pavement" won't be impressive, but someone who can speak to volunteering, interning, and temping, anything to show that you're busy and proactive while looking for the right opportunity, will be more impressive. It's never too late to start today.

Job Interviews 101: How to Ace 5 Key Questions Every Recruiter Will Ask Be Prepared. Common Questions Can Trip You Up, Expert Says

By TORY JOHNSON

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We know the job market is really tough, and the pressure to ace an interview (when you land one) has never been greater. There are several questions every jobseeker should be ready for, no matter what the position. Many are very common, yet they're also the ones that pose the greatest challenge when you're sitting in the hot seat, especially if you haven't fully prepared a response.

Before the big day, rehearse your responses. Write them down. Record yourself and play back the responses. Solicit feedback from trusted advisors who'll give you a candid opinion. Use social media, such as message boards and Facebook friends, to ask for feedback too. Do whatever it takes until you're convinced that the answers convey confidence in yourself and your ability to do the job you're seeking.

Question 1: Tell me About Yourself

Abby Ludens, a recruiter with Mattress Firm, always starts with this: "Tell me about yourself, and by that I mean tell me about your background, your experience and highlight anything you'd like to share and we'll go from there." This is the most common interview question, and it's the one where so many people get tongue-tied. This isn't your life story, nor should it be too personal. Your answer should reflect your professional side and it should directly tie into the position you're seeking. Sell yourself for his particular job by highlighting that you have the skills the role requires.

Let's say it's a retail sales position. Your response may be, "I've spent the last six years in retail sales. Before that I worked in call center customer service, and I found that what I liked most -- and where I really excelled -- was in working face to face with customers. I'm an exceptional communicator, I connect well with the people I'm serving, and I'm very

goal-oriented so I thrive on meeting and, many times exceeding, sales targets. In fact, in my last position, I was the top sales person at my location for 10 out of 12 months." And then, if possible, end on a smart question: "I'm curious how sales excellence is measured here?"

Question 2: What is your greatest weakness?

Another common question along these lines: What's your greatest weakness? Always avoid generic stuff like, "I work too hard. I care too much." That won't go over well. Focus on a genuine weakness, but one that won't prevent you from getting this job. For example, "I haven't had a lot of experience with public speaking before large groups, so I don't feel my best when giving big presentations. It's a skill that I'd like to build on so I've enrolled in a course or I'm hoping I'll have a chance to build this skill here."

Another example: "I've had trouble in the past with managing e-mail -- instead of allowing it to manage me and monopolize my time. It's so easy to get distracted by the pressure to respond instantly when e-mails pop into your inbox, but I'm learning that the best time management rules dictate that it's best to check and respond to e-mail at designated times instead of every minute of the day. That's helped me to be far more productive than ever before, and it's a work in progress that I'm constantly aware of." Maybe there's a technical skill you need improvement with. Just be sure to show how you're working on this objective.

Question 3: What do you know about us?

Jim Thomason, vice president of human resources for Nashville-based Thomas Nelson, a publishing company, usually asks candidates what they know about this company. This question gets at whether you really want to work here -- or if you're looking for any job with any employer. Do you know the bare bones or can you demonstrate a depth of knowledge?

Too often candidates don't do the research, or they assume the interviewer shares whatever they need to know about the organization. Wrong. The best answer will allow you to show off your research -- it'll be clear that you've done your homework because you know the company, its history, the trends impacting the industry in which it operates, and its top competitors. This shows you're very interested in this employer, not just any company.

Question 4: What is your five-year plan?

Another common one that so many people dread: Where you do see yourself in five years? Wrong answers: In your job, on the beach, anywhere but here -- even if that's how you really feel. Or you feel like saying none of us can predict tomorrow; how can we possibly know what's five years ahead of us. Not good either.

The answer should reflect growth with that company. "I'd like to become the best sales person in the company and help train other sales leaders. I'd like to be the best science teacher in this school system to enable our classrooms to be used as a model of excellence." If it's a small company, you may try: "I'd very much like to help build this company's bottom line so I'm able to take advantage of the great opportunities that a growing company has to offer."

Question 5: How do you handle high-pressure moments?

At accounting giant Ernst & Young, Larry Nash, national recruiting director, is fond of asking, "Tell me about the most high-pressure situation you've dealt with in the past six months." These days many examples may come to mind. We all face challenges on the job and in life, but we don't all handle them the same way. Questions like this one are looking for specific anecdotes and situations, not hypotheticals. What you did in the past, not what you might do in the future.

If you've been at work, your answer may reflect a tight deadline you had to meet, one that was perhaps sprung on you with little notice. Or maybe you've witnessed layoffs and you've had to absorb twice as much work with half the staff. If the question specifies six months and you've been out of work during that time, then your answer will reflect a personal challenge. Did you have to make a big decision about the medical care of a family member? How did you go about weighing the options before making a decision? Have you faced a financial challenge?

Without divulging information that's too personal, and may reflect poorly on your candidacy, think about how to best answer the question. Recently a jobseeker told me that her most intense moment came at Christmas time. Since both she and her husband have been out of work, they didn't want to splurge on their annual holiday vacation, yet they also wanted to shield their kids from any kind of financial burden. They weighed the options and realized financial responsibility takes precedent--and they wound up planning an exciting holiday at home. Everyone was happy. That shows she made a logical decision, not one rooted in emotions of guilt -- and not one where she threw caution to the wind. And she was careful to weigh the feelings and opinions of everyone involved, not just herself. Furthermore, she's not crying woe is me, which is important. She's showing that she's a real problem solver.

No matter what your response, interviewers are looking for how you handle change, how adaptable you are, your thought process, and your decision making skills, especially since you'll be faced with the need to make regular decisions on the job.

Looking for Work? Be Seen as Experienced Rather Than Overqualified How to Ace Four Common Questions About Your Work History

By TORY JOHNSON

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Oh, that dreaded "o" word. Job seekers over 40 hear it all the time: "You're overqualified." Makes you want to scream or cry. Don't. Instead, be ready to tackle it with confidence. These are the four most common questions and comments that job seekers on Facebook and Twitter told me they're faced with around the topic of being overqualified.

"When a recruiter says, 'Sorry, you're overqualified,' how should I respond?"

Keep talking! The biggest mistake is to assume the conversation ends there. Probe. Ask, with genuine curiosity, not defensively, "What exactly do you mean by that? Please tell me what your specific concerns are." The goal is to engage in conversation to get the recruiter or hiring manager to reveal the real meaning behind the label. It's important for you to

understand what the employer is truly concerned about that's causing them to dismiss you as overqualified. And most likely, you'll be able to answer or address it from there.

"I've been told, 'You'll be bored.' Even though I know I won't be, I'm not sure how to convey that."

You can say, "One of the benefits of a solid work history is the wisdom and experience of avoiding a situation where I'd be bored or where I'd be an awkward fit. That's not good for either of us." Add that you thought seriously about that very issue before applying for the position, and then move into explanation why exactly you're a great match. Turn "overqualified" into "exceptionally qualified."**"Because of my age, a couple of employers have expressed concern that I might resist direction from a younger or less experienced manager. Truth is, I'd be fine with that, but I don't know how to say so."**

There's no doubt that age bias exists, and generational diversity is a challenge for many people. A few things: One of the common unspoken stereotypes among younger managers is the idea that they couldn't possibly manage mom. So you can smile and joke, "You don't need a parent and you're not looking to be one!" You're looking to be an employee and a collaborator. If you've had a younger manager in a previous position, mention that and emphasize all of the positive attributes of that relationship. "My best boss happened to be younger than me -- and I did some of my best work under her direction." Don't refer to the "good ol' days," or, "The way we've always done it." It may seem familiar and friendly, but it fuels the stereotypes of older workers. Keep up with technology and be sure you can talk about your technical skills, including use of online social networks. (Even including the URL for your LinkedIn profile or your Twitter account -- assuming both are professional -- on your resume can emphasize your comfort level with technology.)

"I've been told several times by a staffing firm that hiring managers are worried that I'll leave when something better comes along."

What I'd love to answer to that is, "Ah, wouldn't you? Don't most people bolt when something much better comes along?" But of course you can't say that. You should point to loyalty to a previous employer -- show a long-term prior commitment to break the notion that you're a job hopper. You can also say, "I have every intention of diving in and making a great impact on this organization -- and I'll do everything in my power to make this a mutually-rewarding long-term relationship. Leaving is the last thing on my mind." Asked and answered!