

Eight of the Toughest Interview Questions and How to Answer Like a Pro

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When getting ready for an interview, practice really does make perfect. You can have the best qualifications in the world, but without good preparation your interview could still go down the tubes. To help you get ready for the big day, we have put together a list of some of the most challenging interview questions. While this list is just a small fraction of the "toughies," it will get you off to a good start and help prepare you for some zingers.

1. Tell me about yourself.

This question is difficult to answer because it is so broad. The important thing to know is that the interviewer does not want to know about your hometown or what you do on the weekends. He or she is trying to figure you out professionally. Pick a couple of points about yourself, your professional experience and your career goals. This is your "30-second commercial" message about yourself. Wrap up your answer by discussing your desire to join the company.

2. What makes you unique?

This question requires that you "toot your own horn," which is difficult for many people. The trick is coming up with positive characteristics that relate to the job, but ones that not everyone uses. Stay away from "I am hardworking and enthusiastic." Give the interviewer specific examples of what you have done. For example: "It is my experience that makes me uniquely qualified for this position. I managed a team of six salespeople, and did so while maintaining my own vigorous sales schedule. Thus, I have had the unique opportunity to be on both the management side and the frontline sales side of the business, and have learned from both perspectives."

3. What interests you the most about this position? What interests you the least?

There are two tricks for this question. First, you need to know enough about the company and position to be able to tell the interviewer what interests you the most. For the second part, steer clear of negativity. Try to downplay this part of the question as much as possible. For example, "My passion is for getting out in the field and selling, but I also understand the importance of administrative tasks and will remain equally committed to those duties I have inside the office."

4. What did you like most about your last job? What did you like least?

While the first part of this question does not initially seem hard, you want to be careful what you pick as your favorite part of your last job. Try to talk about aspects of your experience that will help you in your new position. For the second part of the question, you need to be careful about sounding too negative. Even if you truly hated your previous job, put a positive spin on the negatives.

5. Why did you leave (or are you leaving) your last job?

Regardless of why you left, the main goal is to stay positive. You never want to say negative things about a past employer. If you were fired, be honest but quick. Stick to the facts and demonstrate how you learned from the experience and how it will help you in your next position. If you were laid off, simply state the facts. If you quit, be positive about the company. Tell the interviewer it was time for you to move on and you were looking for a new experience and something that was more challenging.

6. Why do you want this job? or Why do you want to work for us?

You need to demonstrate that you have researched the company before the interview and give concrete examples of why you want the job. For example, "I have read many positive reviews about the company's strength in the marketplace and know that the products I will be selling perform well and are good value. In addition, I have been very impressed with the overall philosophy of the company and its growth strategy and I'm interested in growing along with it."

7. What would you do if your boss asked you to do something you felt was unethical?

Like many "what if" questions, this one is designed to find out how you handle sticky situations. You want to be able to demonstrate that you are able to think through difficult situations and handle them with grace. Let the interviewer know that you would talk to your boss about your concerns, see if there was another side to the issue that you hadn't thought of and try to solve the problem together.

8. What are your salary expectations?

This is one of the hardest questions, particularly for those with little experience. Steer clear of discussing salary specifics before receiving a job offer. Let the interviewer know that you will be open to discussing fair compensation when the time comes. If pressed for a more specific answer, always give a range instead of a specific number.

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Top 10 Questions to Ask in an Interview

By Robin Ryan, Career Coach

At some point in every interview the employer will ask, "Do you have any questions?" A top manager at Cingular Wireless, who has hired numerous employees, shared this insight: "I judge candidates by the questions they ask. That's what's most revealing to me. I want someone focused on succeeding in the job and not just centered around how much money I will pay them."

An HR Director for Microsoft added: "Frequently the candidate, ill-prepared, searches his mind for just anything to ask. That person appears dumb, or uninterested, causing me to question what kind of employee they'd be."

This will not happen to you. Take time before the interview to draft good questions, but stick to asking job duty and organizational questions only. But do not ask questions about the salary, benefits or perks. The best time to cover those issues is after you've been offered the job.

Your questions can determine whether this job, company and boss are a good fit for you. Every organization has a workplace environment we call the corporate culture. It defines what it is actually like to work there. You may have had preconceived ideas. They are often proven to be inaccurate once you get into the interview and begin to ask your questions. Better to learn you don't want this job now than three weeks after you've started. Therefore, pay close attention to the answers and determine whether this is a boss you would like to work with every day.

Too often this happens: A few weeks ago a man approached me at a seminar and said he wished he had asked more questions. Instead he impulsively took a job and two weeks later he knew it was a huge mistake. Don't let that happen to you.

Create some questions and make a written list to refer to in the interview. Consider these top 10 questions:

- 1. "Could you describe to me your typical management style and the type of employee that works well with you?"**
- 2. "Where are your major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?"**
- 3. "What is your company's policy on providing seminars, workshops and training so employees can develop their skills?"**
- 4. "Are there any restraints or cutbacks planned that would decrease the budget here?"**
- 5. "What particular computer equipment and software do you use here? When was your last upgrade?"**
- 6. "How will my performance be measured? By whom?"**
- 7. "Are there any weaknesses in the department that you are working on improving?"**
- 8. "What types of people seem to excel here?"**
- 9. "Can you give me an idea of the typical workload and extra hours or special needs it demands?"**
- 10. "Describe the atmosphere of the office."**

Your list of questions will help you get the information you need to make the best job choice. It will also impress the employer.

Source: '60 Seconds and You're Hired,' by Robin Ryan

Robin Ryan has appeared on the Dr. Phil Show, Oprah, NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, CNN, CNBC and is considered America's top career coach. She is the best-selling author of: '60 Seconds & You're Hired!'; 'Winning Resumes'; 'Winning Cover Letters' and 'What to Do with the Rest of Your Life.' She's the creator of the highly acclaimed audio training program Interview Advantage and The DreamMaker. To purchase her books and audio training programs go to <http://www.robinryan.com>. To contact Robin, e-mail RobinRyan@aol.com or call 425-226-0414.

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