

# QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED IN THE INTERVIEW

The best questions to ask are those that begin with who, what, when, where, why, or how. Please attend to those "lead" words as you ask and answer questions in the interview.

## Questions about Yourself

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you consider to be one of your weaknesses (strengths)?
- What can you do that someone else can't do?
- What qualifications do you have that indicate you will be successful in your field? How would they relate to our position? What do you have to offer?
- What are your own special abilities?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed over the past year?
- What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
- What are your greatest work and non-work accomplishments during the past two years?
- Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.
- What motivates you?
- What have you been doing since your graduation from college? Since you left your last job?
- How would a co-worker, or friend, or boss describe you?
- What are your interests outside of work, school?
- What qualities do you admire most in others?
- How would you describe your own work style?

## Questions about Your Careers Goals or Plans

- What would you like to be doing in five (ten) years from now?
- What type of position are you interested in?
- What are your salary requirements? Short term/long term?
- What is success? What personal characteristics will contribute to your success?
- How will employment with us contribute to your career plans?
- What do you expect from a job?
- What are your career objectives? Short and long range?
- This job is a total change from previous employment. How does it fit your career goals?
- What are your location preferences?

## Questions about School/Education

- How does your education relate to this position (or how does your education prepare you for this position)?
- What activities did you engage in at school?
- What classes did you like most in school? Least? Why?
- Why did you decide to go to \_\_\_\_\_ school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Describe your academic strengths and weaknesses.
- What are your plans for continuing your education?
- What career related skills do you possess as a result of your academic preparation?
- What have you read recently in your field?

## Previous Experience Questions

- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- How often, and in what way did you communicate with your subordinates and superiors?
- What were the biggest pressures on your last job?
- How did your job description for your last job change while you held it?
- What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- Whom may we contact for references?

## Situational/Behavioral Questions

- What is one of the toughest problems you've ever had to solve, or decisions you've ever had to make? Why was it difficult? How did you solve it? (Domino questioning)
- What science or advanced math courses have you taken? Describe some of the basic principles.
- How would you figure out how many ATM machines there are in the U.S.?
- What criteria would you use to determine the top ten priority accounts for a new sales territory?
- Give an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
- How would you motivate an employee who was performing poorly?
- What was the biggest risk you have ever taken?
- Give an example of a situation you've encountered where you didn't back down in the face of adversity.
- Tell about an unpopular decision you have made. How long did it take to make the decision? Why did the decision arise? How do you think you handled it?
- When have you felt overwhelmed? Tell me about it.

- What would you do if your co-workers were complaining to you about the company?
- Let's say your manager gave you ten things to do by 5:00 p.m. and you realized that you couldn't finish them all. What would you do? How would you prioritize them?
- Tell me about a time when you've "bent" the rules. When is it okay to do so?

### Questions Specific to the Company/Job

- Why should we hire you?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about this organization?
- What salary do you expect?
- Why do you think you would like this type of position? Company?
- What kind of boss do you like to work for?
- How long do you intend to stay here?
- What do you think determines a person's progress in an organization?
- What interests you about our product or service? How would you improve it?
- What do you think would be your greatest contribution to our operation?
- How do you solve problems?
- When can you start to work?
- Can you travel overnight?

### Problem Questions

- *"Tell me about yourself."* This question is asked to find out about your job skills. Answer it by describing your best qualifications for the job. Be specific and use examples to support your claim.
- *"What is your major weakness?"* Never discuss a weakness that would rule you out of consideration by the employer. There are several techniques for dealing with this question. You could mention a weakness that will not significantly hinder you in the job for which you are interviewing. You can also highlight a strength that compensates for the weakness, and/or you can describe steps you are taking to overcome the weakness. Another strategy sometimes suggested is to mention a "weakness" that may be viewed as a strength.

Example: "I've always dreaded talking in front of large groups, but I took a public speaking class last semester to develop my skills in that area and to force me to practice. I think I am improving and gaining the confidence to do this when I need to."

Example: "I have a tendency to say 'yes' to too many responsibilities. For example, when I was Rush Chair for my fraternity, I also signed up to volunteer at the Free Clinic three nights a week. I soon learned that I could not do both in one semester and keep my grades up too, so I talked one of my friends into taking over my clinic hours. This experience helped me learn to prioritize and also taught me the importance of saying 'no' when I do not have the time to do something."

- *"How much do you expect to be paid?"*  
Never state a flat dollar amount unless you know what the job pays. Try a neutral statement: "I would expect to be paid what other persons in this job are paid" or state a range that you know would encompass any offer, but which goes a bit higher than you would find acceptable. Or answer with a question: "How much does the job pay?" "How much is a new employee usually paid?" If you have experience: "How much do you usually pay someone with my experience?" Emphasize your skills, and ask the employer what he or she feels your skills are worth.
- *"Why do you want to work for this company?"*  
The employer expects you to show knowledge of and interest in the company. You can do this with an answer that indicates that you have researched the company before the interview. Example: "I've talked with some of your employees and they feel that this a good company to work for because..." "I have been reading that your company is really growing fast, planning two new branches this year. I want to work for your company because the future looks promising."
- *"Why did you leave your last job?"*  
The employer is trying to find out if you had any problems on your last job.
- Never say anything negative about yourself or your previous employer. If you did have problems think of a way to explain without being negative.
- Don't use the word fired. Use words such as "laid off" or "position was cut."
- If you were fired and are not on good terms with your previous employer, maybe you should explain. Try to show that you learned something from the situation.
- Tell the employer that the former problem (if it is personal) will not affect your work.
- Common reasons for leaving: general layoff, job was temporary, moved to a new area, company went out of business, no room for advancement, wanted a job that would better use your skills.
- *"What are your future plans?"*  
The interviewer wants to know if you are ambitious, plan ahead and set goals for yourself. The interviewer may also want to know what kind of expectations you have of the company. Often this question causes concern for students who are considering graduate study in the future because they don't know how much to reveal. Usually an employer does not expect you to know exactly where you hope to go in the future, but your answer should communicate an awareness of where the position for which you are interviewing might lead.

Example: "I know that generally it is possible to move from this sales position to a sales management position in about a year, and I would look forward to having the responsibility for training and supervising a sales team. From there, I know I could move into sales for a larger territory or sales of a more expensive product line. I also have an interest in marketing. And I would consider graduate study in business in the future. My goals will become more clear as I gain experience and have the opportunity to learn more about what it takes to be successful in sales and marketing. I know your company has a tuition reimbursement program; could you tell me about it?"

If you choose to mention graduate study plans, keep the time frame and your plans open-ended. Even if you believe you definitely will go back to school in one year, that plan could genuinely change if you have a job you don't want to leave, so don't jeopardize your opportunity to get that job by alerting the employer to your expectation of such a short-term work experience.

### Illegal Questions

Questions that relate to gender, race, color, national origin, religion, age or disabilities are illegal, unless the employer can demonstrate that they

relate to bona fide requirements of the job. Generally, questions about family planning and home responsibilities are also illegal. However, often illegal questions do get asked in interviews. Your immediate reaction might be to confront the interviewer about his/her right to ask such a question, but such a confrontation will probably kill your chances of getting the job. Simply refusing to answer is also very risky; few employers would give further consideration to any candidate refusing to answer a question. Of course, either of the tactics is fine if you have decided you don't want this job. If you do want the offer, then three possible strategies are to:

- Answer honestly, explaining how your circumstances may be an asset, if possible. (Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married? A. I will be getting married in August and my fiancée and I have agreed to focus our job searches on Atlanta. We are both very committed to our career goals and to working hard to support each other.)
- State what you assume the employer hopes to learn by asking the question, and then answer in response to that assumption. Sometimes this gives the interviewer time to recognize on his/her own that an illegal question has been asked. (Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married? A. I guess that, in asking about my wedding plans, you may be wondering if I am truly committed to a career, and more specifically, whether I would be likely to be able to move at the end of your training program. I want to assure you that although my personal relationships are certainly very important to me, so are my career goals and my work relationships. I am very enthusiastic about having the opportunity to participate in your training program, and then to take on management responsibility for a branch store. I am aware of the need to move to either Richmond or Norfolk in order to do that, and I feel confident that I will be able to do so. Otherwise, I would not be asking for your consideration today.)
- Sometimes it is possible to answer with humor or to simply deflect the question, if you are good at thinking on your feet. (Q. How are you going to feel when you make sales calls on white customers? A. I'll feel proud of the quality product line I represent. Q. Do you have any health problems? A. Yes I'm a workaholic. [These ideas are from [Get Hired! Winning Strategies to Ace the Interview](#) by Paul C. Green, p. 129.])