

## Preparing for Interviews

To stand out from all other candidates and come across in interviews as being in control of your search, you'll need to have excellent answers to tough interview questions. The questions most often asked are grouped into the following categories:

- A. Your most recent job
- B. Work-related issues
- C. Education and career objectives
- D. People skills
- E. Decision-making and judgment processes
- F. Personal style, perception of yourself, leadership skills, and other

You may find some questions in one area that are similar to questions in another area. This is common and not done to trip you up, but to see how you might answer the question under a different set of circumstances. Be candid and honest in ALL your answers, as the interviewer will know if you aren't.

You'll notice that many of the questions are behavioral, such as "Tell me about a bad decision you made." Following your response, they may ask follow-on questions, such as: "What happened, and what did you do to correct it?" "What did you learn or take away from that experience?" Describe what happened. If something humorous happened in the process, mention it, even if it pokes fun at you. Employers feel empathetic towards employees who can laugh at themselves and their mistakes. No one ever succeeded in a manager's role without making mistakes and learning from them.

Other questions may be "How do you decide between quality and budget on projects when you can't meet both." Don't be lulled into thinking that this is just a hypothetical question. If you answer it as such with a well-thought-out response, the interviewer is likely to ask for an example from your past. When you answer these presumed-hypothetical questions, answer with an example from your personal experience.

Candidates frequently try to give answers they assume the interviewer is looking for, no matter how disingenuous, or they give a nice-sounding, non-specific answer. If the interviewer thinks you might have been coached to give right answers, you'll probably have a pleasant but short interview.

## How to use this list

1. Review the list and make notes about each question. Note key words or phrases that will jog your memory of what you want to say if they ask you the question. DON'T write your answers in the space provided.
2. Prioritize or rank the questions by the importance you attach to each one or by the difficulty you had in answering each question. Use 1 for all the tough or most important questions, 2 for lesser importance, and 3 for relatively easy ones. Alternatively, you could use a highlighter to color-code them instead of using numbers – e.g., red for very important or difficult, yellow for somewhat important or difficult, and green for easy.
3. Just before your interview, refresh your memory by reviewing the questions and your key words and notes, focusing on the most important ones. If they ask other questions that aren't on this list, write them down after your interview and review them before your next interview.

### **A. Your most recent job**

1. Tell me about the main products and services of your most recent employer.
2. Who were its strongest competitors, and how did your company differentiate itself in the marketplace?
3. What were your primary responsibilities there?
4. What aspects gave you the most satisfaction in that job?
5. What did you consider the most crucial aspects of the job?
6. Tell me about a difficult situation you were in at your last job and how you dealt with it.
7. Who were you responsible to, and for what?

8. What aspects did you like least about the job?
9. What was your biggest challenge in your last job?
10. Questions about your leaving your most recent employer, such as: Why were you let go from X Company? Why are you leaving (or considering leaving) X Company? What are the circumstances of your leaving X Company?
11. What did you see in this job (current or last) that led you to accept it?
12. Looking back, if you had one thing to do differently, what would it be? How would you do it differently?

**B. Work-related issues**

13. What is your greatest achievement so far? (They're interested in career-related achievements, since the interview is for a job, not personal or family issues.)
14. What are your three most important skills?
15. What fringe benefits are most important to you?
16. What do you consider your most important areas of experience?
17. What limitations would you have about traveling and working away from home?

**C. Education and career objectives**

18. What factors led you to choose the career you're in?
19. How do you feel about your progress so far?
20. Given the choice, what schooling or training would you like to undertake at this stage in your career?
21. What are your career goals?
22. Where would you like your career to be in one (three or five years)?
23. What skills and abilities do you most enjoy using?
24. What do you consider the most significant trends in your field today?
25. If you were 18 again, is there anything you would do differently in your education or career? If so, what?
26. What would your ideal job description say?

**D. People skills**

27. How do you motivate your staff? (Be prepared for a follow-up question asking for an example.)
28. What qualities do you particularly respect and admire in others?
29. What experience have you had with difficult people at work, and how have you dealt with them?
30. In your experience, what traits have bothered or concerned you about your superiors?
31. Do you prefer to work in a team or on your own?
32. How do you think your colleagues and those reporting to you would assess your communication skills?
33. If you were assigned as part of a team, what would be your natural role on that team? Why?

**E. Decision-making and judgment processes**

34. What types of decisions do you agonize over? (examples)
35. How would you describe your ability to delegate?
36. How do you keep track of work you have delegated? (examples)

37. What experience have you had appraising others' job performance? (examples)
38. What are your views on formal appraisals?
39. How do you make decisions when you're leading a team? (examples)
40. When you participate in a team effort, which role is your natural style? Can you give me an example?
41. What experience have you had recruiting staff? (examples)

**F. Personal style, perception of yourself, leadership skills, and other**

42. What are your three greatest strengths? (If your answers here and your answers to question 14 about your skills are different, bridge the gap for them as they may not distinguish between skills and strengths.)
43. What are your three most significant weaknesses? (Be open and honest. Add how you compensate for your weaknesses, not how you have overcome them.)
44. What particularly motivates you?
45. Who is your role model or hero? Why?
46. What leadership skills do you most admire in others?
47. How would you describe your own leadership skills?

48. Has a previous employer ever hired a coach for you? If so, what were the circumstances?
49. Which leadership skills would you like to develop or improve?
50. Which leadership skills have you been told you need to improve?
51. How would you describe your administrative skills?
52. How would your close friends describe you?
53. What do you do to counteract pressure or stress?
54. What types of stress do you consider unnecessary?
55. How would you describe your sense of humor?
56. In what areas do you feel your communication skills are particularly strong?
57. What do you see as the most challenging tasks for you in this position?
58. What do you most want in life?
59. Tell me about yourself. (Think about this for a moment before responding. Tell highlights about your career in an outline fashion and do not exceed two minutes. If they want more details, they'll ask for them.)
60. Why should we hire you?