Answering Common Interview Questions

Preparing for a job interview? The best way to get ready is to review some potential interview questions and prepare and practice your answers ahead of time. Here are nine of the most common interview questions, along with suggestions about how to develop good responses.

Tell me about yourself.
Often the first question in a job interview, answering this crucial question well will make a good first impression. The interviewer wants to see how confident and articulate you are. Avoid discussing your personal life or hobbies. The focus should be on work related things such as what you do for a living, what you're good at, and what you're looking for in your career. Don't give your complete employment history. Instead, summarize a few specific work accomplishments or experiences.

Tell me about a situation where you did not get along with a superior.
Everyone has had situations where they did not agree with their boss. Telling an interviewer that you've never worked for someone you didn't get along with may cause him or her to question your integrity. It could also indicate that you are not experienced enough or haven't been in any situations that required you to deal with confrontation. Instead, give an example of when this has occurred in the past and explain that you presented your reasons and openly listed to others as well.

What are your strengths?
Share your true strengths, particularly focusing on any that may be needed for the position. Describe two or three skills if they are relevant to the job. Follow up with an example of how these strengths will help you in the position.

What is your greatest weakness?
Avoid responding with the common, "I'm a perfectionist" or "I take my work home with me/I constantly think about work even while at home". By giving a real answer, the interviewer will see that you are being genuine and admitting you have growth opportunities and are not perfect. The key to this question is to think of something that you struggle with, but that you can show that you are working to improve. For example, someone who struggles with public speaking might volunteer to lead meetings.

What do you do when you are not working?
Interviewers want to know if you're well adjusted, happy and able to fit in with the company culture. Discuss your hobbies and interests, including activities, clubs and favorite things to read. Avoid discussing any potentially "hot" topics, such as religion or politics.

Why did you leave your last position?
Keep things positive and phrase things in such a way that in shows you're eager to take on new responsibilities. Be honest and straightforward, but avoid badmouthing employers or complaining about your work. It's common to state that you're seeking a new challenge or opportunity, but be prepared to be specific about them and how the new position would provide them in a way that your last job didn't.

What are your salary requirements?

Job seekers are almost always asked this question, and it's critical that you do your homework. Head to sites like PayScale or Glassdoor to do a little research. Determine a range based on your experience, education and skills. Then, make sure the hiring manager knows that you're flexible.

Tell me about a time when…

These types of questions are an opportunity for you to share situations when you had to take the initiative, deal with a difficult client/customer/coworker, or solve a problem. Prepare for these types of questions by brainstorming the skills you'll likely need in the job and determining challenges you may encounter. Then construct answers from your past work that demonstrate that you can meet those needs and challenges.

What questions do you have for me?

At the end of every job interview, you'll likely be asked if you have any questions. It's good to ask one or two questions. It shows that you are interested and motivated. Ask about the next steps of the interviewing process and/or the work environment. Avoid questions about benefits and pay; hold those for once you have an offer.