



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BEHAVIORAL

+ ANSWERING TIPS

365 Careers

Give me an example of a time when you had to go the extra-mile?

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do"

Steve Jobs

Going the extra-mile is rarely a one-time act. More often, it is an ingrained habit. You need to properly explain to your recruiter that you love the idea of working that job. Also, explain how you want to be excellent at it. Your internal drive towards excellence is what motivates you to go the extra-mile – to do the things that you are not expected to do:

- Study during the weekends
- Stay late in the office
- Striving for excellence constantly

If the job you are interviewing for is what you chose for your life, then you want to be excellent at it. Striving to achieve excellent performance is important. It means that you want to put quality in your work and create value for the company. Internal drive is probably the best reason to go the extra-mile; you are willing to do what is necessary in order to be good at what you do.

An example of such a situation:

During your previous internship experience, you put in a lot of extra effort in order to show that your tutor who also recruited you did not make a mistake. You stayed late and studied during the weekend because you wanted to improve your skills and to do it faster. The positive impression that you left with your work led to an excellent valuation and very positive feedback about your willingness to learn.

Provide me an example of a time when you had to teach someone a new skill?

This is an easy one, right? The Hiring Manager wants you to demonstrate that you are a person that is willing to teach others. The fact that you are willing to teach means a few very important things:

- You are willing to share knowledge (very valuable for the company)
- You are a team player who is willing to help others
- You relate well to people

The second aspect that is important about this question is the method that you used when you were teaching. How did you share your knowledge? Did you have to use some special technique in order to explain a given concept? Did you have a strategy that helped to facilitate learning? Perhaps you provided valid practical examples?

An example of such a situation:

For example, you can say that you always wanted to teach your younger brother how to create good PowerPoint presentations. At first, it was difficult because it was very hard to get his attention. Then you proposed creating a presentation together – a presentation about his favorite motorbike company. He instantly agreed, because it was something that he was interested in sharing with his friends and perhaps post in one of his favorite forums. At first, you were the one who was working with the mouse and the keyboard, but then you let him complete the second half of the presentation and you gave him your guidance throughout the process. The results were amazing your brother learned so much in such a short period of time. This was a very fulfilling experience for you and you realized that you enjoy teaching.

Give me an example of a time when you worked as a team?

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."
Henry Ford

One of the greatest virtues in the modern corporate world is the ability to work well as a team. Make sure that you are ready with a story that shows you are able to do exactly that. A team worker can be distinguished by his/her ability to:

- Put the team's needs first
- Communicate well with the other team members
- Want to succeed as a part of a group
- Listen actively
- Respect others
- Appreciate other work styles

Keep in mind these qualities when you think of a story when you were part of a team. The story should demonstrate not only the fact that you were part of the team, but also that you were a great one too.

An example of such a situation:

A group assignment during the last year of your studies required you and four of your classmates to perform a detailed Company Valuation. This is a pretty difficult task that requires a significant amount of work. The deadline for submitting the complete work was in 2 weeks. At the time, you were busy filling out internship applications and had to prepare for some of your other exams. This was the case for the other team members as well. Nevertheless, all of you concentrated full-time on the project, as you understood that this was the only way you could have respected the tight deadline imposed. Another interesting thing about the project was that you managed to work well together, despite the different styles that each group member had. You listened actively and were open to the ideas that the other team members had, given that they came from a different background and could certainly add value to the project. Good communication helped team members to coordinate their responsibilities and integrate the separate pieces of work that were assigned individually.

Can you tell me a time when you were able to build motivation in your co-workers?

This question aims to assess whether you are a good leader and a positive influence at your workplace. Hiring managers look for people who are motivated themselves and are able to transmit their drive to their co-workers. Strong motivation makes for excellent results.

In order to be able to motivate someone, you have to fully understand the person that you are approaching. What is it that they currently need in order to be excited about a project? Perhaps they need:

- One-on-one coaching
- Interesting tasks
- More complicated tasks
- Responsibility
- Autonomy
- Recognition
- A positive perspective

An example of such situation:

During your previous internship within the Corporate Finance department of a large firm, you were asked to prepare a Valuation model. There was another intern who was assigned to work with you. Given that she had less experience with Financial Modeling, she could only help you with minor data entry and consistency checks. You noticed that this was not particularly stimulating for her, as this is something she already knew how to do and she really wanted to learn how to create the model itself. You realized that she would be more motivated to do her part if she was given the opportunity to learn as well. That is why you asked her whether she would like to sit next to you while you work on the model, so that the two of you can comment on what you are doing together. This greatly motivated her and she came up with some valuable suggestions when you had to prepare a presentation that summarizes the model that you prepared.

Give an example of a time when you had a goal and you achieved it?

The fact that you were able to achieve a goal shows determination, drive and the ability to execute. An important part of the whole story that you will tell is what you learned during the process of working towards your goal. Describe what skills you used in order to achieve your goal and how these skills will be valuable in the future. Choose a story that shows that you are persistent, dedicated and willing to go the extra mile - something important that you achieved.

An example of such a situation:

During the penultimate year of your university studies, you decided that you would like to pursue a career in Business Development. You did not have any previous work experience and you figured that a summer internship would improve your chances of sourcing a good opportunity in the future. The problem is that the summer internship turned out to be tougher to get than you initially thought, especially for someone without any previous work experience. You filled around 15 online applications, but did not receive a call back. Then you started replying to online ads, but that did not produce the necessary results either. The best thing that you did is that you did not give up. Given that you were interested in a career in Business Development, an experience with a startup firm appeared to be a great choice for you. That is why you made a list of interesting startup firms and started visiting their offices asking whether they would need a hand during the summer. Eventually, you found a great opportunity that allowed you to work with the product development team of a startup company where you were able to work closely with the firm's first customers collecting their feedback. This story taught you that proactivity and persistence pay off in the long run. Working towards a goal is a process that you have to do over a sustained period of time. This is exactly why it requires dedication.

Describe a time when you had to persuade someone in order to see things your way?

Persuading involves being able to convince other people to take the appropriate action. You need to develop a line of reasoned argument and explain to the people that you want to persuade that the best thing to do is to take action. In order to show that you are good at persuading, think of an example when you:

- Focused on both your needs and the needs of the person with whom you worked with
- There was a clear, logical reason behind your argument
- You were able to show mutual benefit that would come from taking action

An example of such situation:

Imagine that you are a university student and you are given a group assignment. The group consists of you and three other people – Jim, John and Jack. The task at hand is to develop a business plan for a completely new product and deliver a final presentation to potential investors. At your first meeting together, both Jim and Jack expressed that they would like to work on the financial projections of the business model. You immediately take notice of this issue. While Jim has studied a number of Finance classes and has additional preparation coming from a summer internship in the Finance department of a firm, this is not the case with Jack. He has studied mostly Management related subjects and has no previous experience in working with numbers. Given that you realize how important it is to keep a good atmosphere within the group, you approach Jack at the end of the meeting. You explain to him that it is really important that all of you do well at this assignment, because it is worth 60% of your final grade. According to you, one of the most critical parts in launching a new product is the initial marketing of the product. You explain to Jack that he will be great at working on that, while Jim would be able to handle the financials given his previous experience. By having both of them work at something that they are good at, the team will have a better chance of receiving an excellent grade at the end.

Describe a time when you were under pressure?

The recruiter wants to understand how you handle pressure. Are you someone who is likely to abandon the boat when things get a little tough? Every firm needs people that are reliable. All jobs involve a certain element of pressure; some more than others, obviously. Your task here is to give an example of a stressful situation and show how you coped with it.

An example of such situation:

I was under significant pressure before taking my GMAT exam. I needed a really good grade in order to be admitted to the graduate school that I am now graduating from. A few weeks before the exam, I noticed that I was becoming nervous. Two things helped me handle the pressure much better; I started sleeping for at least 7 hours (going to bed earlier in the evening) and I dedicated at least one hour a day to sport activities. This had a hugely positive impact on my concentration and stress level.

How do you handle a challenge?

First of all, you want to give the impression that you are someone who welcomes challenge. You are a person who is willing to leave his/her comfort zone and embrace challenging situations. You learn the most when you are put in a difficult situation. And this is certainly something that the Hiring Manager is looking to hear from you. The second part of the question is how you actually handle challenge. Do you have a structured approach? Are you a person who builds a plan of action and then sticks to it? It would be best if you could provide an example of your past experience. A story showing that:

- you understood the issue
- you created a plan of action
- you executed the plan of action successfully

An example of such a situation:

Let's say that you were admitted to a Master in Quantitative Finance. A really challenging situation arose because you knew that most of the people in the class had already studied Finance and Econometrics, while you concentrated on Management courses. There was a significant gap between your skills and those of others. You realized that. You also realized that the only way to address the issue was to start with the very basics and fill the knowledge gap step by step; a very long process that required significant efforts on your end. An encouraging sign was that the results at the end of the first semester showed that you reduced the gap significantly and were heading in the right direction. By the end of the second semester, your GPA was slightly higher than the average for the class.

How often do you make mistakes? What do you do in order to correct them?

Everybody makes mistakes; we all do. Don't be afraid to speak about one of your past mistakes in the interview. People who make mistakes are usually the ones who are eager to do things that are outside their comfort zone and these happen to be the fastest learners. Now, does that mean that you should tell the recruiter that you make many mistakes? No, as you will come off as negligent and careless. But you can be humble about it and say that you have made mistakes in the past.

What matters most is your perception of these mistakes. Did you learn from them? Did you understand what went wrong? Are you likely to commit the same mistake again? Depending on the role that you are interviewing for, there could be a higher or a lower tolerance towards certain types of mistakes. A Marketing professional is likely to make mistakes until he figures out the right way to structure the company's social networking presence. A Finance practitioner should not make many mistakes with numbers, because this is the basis of his work. Nevertheless, be open about it and tell about a situation when you made a mistake. It would be best if you point out a mistake that is not critical for the position that you are interviewing for. Then it is important to say that you divulged the mistake as soon as you found out there was one. You should conclude by explaining what you learned from that situation and how you took precautionary measures to ensure that you would not commit the same mistake again.

An example of such a situation:

Let's suppose that you are applying for a position in Marketing. You can point out that you made a mistake with financial figures – something that is not indispensable for a good Marketing practitioner. In one of your university projects, you were supposed to prepare a Business Plan. Starting from the historical P&L figures of a firm and then making a forecast about its future. At some point, it became obvious that your predictions are very different than the ones obtained by your classmates. Digging deeper reveals that this is due to a data entry mistake that you made, which you were able to correct instantly. This resolved the issue and your results were aligned with the ones of your classmates. The main lesson that you learned is that you need to be very careful when working with numbers. You would not do the same mistake again, because you started to insert checks at the bottom of the page that will instantly signal that an error has been made.

What do you do if you disagree with someone at work?

It is perfectly normal to disagree with someone at work. Similar situations occur all the time. When answering this question, do not speak about the person that you disagreed with. This is really important, as you do not want to come off as someone who bad mouths people; this is unprofessional. The Hiring Manager is not interested in learning saucy details about the bad habits of that other person. Instead, he/she wants to know more about your conflict management abilities. He/she is eager to learn whether you are an active listener and whether you are good at persuading people.

Every behavioral question comes together with a story that supports the answer given by the candidate. When you answer this question, try to think of a disagreement that was not personal, but derived from different views regarding the execution of a certain task. It is much safer to have this type of disagreement, as it does not suggest you are someone that is difficult to work with.

There are a few key points which you should concentrate on:

- You listened actively
- You were looking for the best possible solution
- You had at heart the team's success rather than showing muscles
- You are persuasive

An example of such a situation:

You and three of your classmates were asked to prepare a Business Plan. Probably the most important part of the whole Business Plan is the prediction of the top line – revenues. You wanted to use a bottom-up approach (starting from the number of units sold at a given price and the number of potential customers at that price) and one of your classmates thought that the top-down approach would be more useful (estimating the total dimensions of the market and arriving to the firm's share of the total market). Both you and your colleague were convinced that your own approach was correct. The work could not continue before resolving this issue. You asked your classmate to elaborate his point and demonstrated that you are interested in his idea; he made a valid point. There was a recent market study that your team could use as reference. It predicted the overall dimensions of the market for the next five years. This was a valuable piece of information, although it is difficult to predict the firm's market share. You explained that the advantage of the bottom-up approach is that you can base your growth assumptions on historical data and incorporate data that is specific for the firm under consideration. After each of you explained your points of view, you came to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to use both approaches and obtain a range that would indicate the company's revenues.

Is there anything else that we should know about you?

Yes. The answer to this question is always “Yes”. There are many things that they should know about you. This question typically comes at the end of the interview and it is an opportunity to close in a strong fashion. There is no need to pass up on this extra opportunity that you are given by the interviewer. Try to address some of the following points that did not come up during the interview:

- Skills that are relevant for the job under consideration
- Past experience that will help you to be successful at this job
- Motivation to work for the company in the particular role that you are interviewing for
- What is going to be your added value to the team that you will be placed in

One of the basic rules in sales is that you need to convince your client that he/she needs your product. This is a similar situation. Make a closing statement that will convince your interviewer that you are the right person that they are looking for.



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

BRAINTEASERS

+ ANSWERING TIPS

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A car travels a distance of 60 miles at an average speed of 30 miles per hour. How fast does the car need to travel on the way back (taking the same road) in order to average 40 miles per hour over the course of the entire trip?

You need to build the following equation:

The total distance that needs to be traveled both ways is 120 miles. The average speed that we need to obtain is 40 miles; therefore, the car must travel for 3 hours in order to achieve that:

$$\frac{120 \text{ miles}}{40 \text{ miles per hour}} = 3 \text{ hours}$$

The car has already traveled for two hours:

$$\frac{60 \text{ miles}}{30 \text{ miles per hour}} = 2 \text{ hours}$$

So, on the way back it needs to travel only 1 hour. The distance is 60 miles. Hence the car needs to travel at 60 miles per hour.

You have eight balls of the same size. Seven of them weigh the same, and one of them weighs slightly more. How can you find the ball that is heavier by using a balance and only two attempts at weighing?

You can put six of the balls on the balance. If one of the sides is heavier you will know that the heavier ball is on that side. If not, the heavier ball is among the two that you did not measure and it will be really easy to determine precisely which ball is heavier with your second weighing.

After you determine which side is heavier, you will be left with 3 balls to choose from. You have another attempt at weighing left. You can put two of the balls on the balance and see if one of them is heavier. If it is, then you have found the heavier ball. If it is not, then the third ball is the one that is heavier.

A windowless room has three light bulbs. You are outside the room with 3 switches, each of them controlling one of the light bulbs. If you were told that you can enter the room only once, how are you going to tell which switch controls which light bulb?

You have to be creative in order to solve this one. You switch on two of the light bulbs and then wait for 30 minutes. Then you switch off one of them and enter the room. You will know which switch controls the light bulb that is on. Here is the tough part. How are you going to be able to determine which switch corresponds to the other two light bulbs? You will have to touch them. Yes. That's right. Touch them and feel, which one of them is heated. That will be the other bulb that you had turned on for 30 minutes.

You will be in serious trouble if the interviewer says that the light bulbs are LED (given that they don't emit heat☺).

What is the sum of the numbers from 1 to 100?

There's a little bit of history coming with this question. The math teacher of young Karl Gauss, the famous mathematician, asked the entire class to sum the numbers from 1 to 100. He expected that the task would require at least half an hour to his students, but was shocked when Gauss gave him the exact number within mere seconds. Anyway, here is how this question is solved.

There are precisely 50 pairs of numbers from 1 to 100, whose sum is 101.

$1 + 100 = 101$, $2 + 99 = 101$, $3 + 98 = 101$, etc.

$$50 * 101 = 5050$$

This trick will work for any series of numbers provided that they are evenly spaced. You need to find the sum of the first and the last number and then multiply by the number of pairs.

**You are given two containers - one is 5 and the other one is 7 gallons.
How do you use them to measure 4 gallons of water?**

Fill the entire 7 gallon container with water. Then use the water in the 7 gallon container in order to fill the entire 5 gallon container. This would leave 2 gallons of water in the 7 gallon container. Dump the water in the 5 gallon container and then pour in it the 2 gallons of water that are in the 7 gallon container. Fill the entire 7 gallon container with water and then start pouring the water in the 5 gallon container. Given that it is already filled with 2 gallons of water, you will be able to pour only 3 gallons, which means that 4 gallons would remain within the 7 gallon container. This is how you are able to measure 4 gallons of water.

You have 100 balls (50 red balls and 50 blue balls) and 2 buckets. You can choose how to divide the balls into the two buckets so as to maximize the probability of selecting a blue ball if 1 ball is chosen from 1 of the buckets at random.

Put 1 blue ball in one of the buckets and put the rest of the balls in the other bucket. This way you will have 50% chance of selecting the bucket with only 1 ball and then, even if it is not selected and you have to draw a ball from the other bucket you would have almost 50% chance of selecting a blue ball (49 blue balls versus 50 red balls). The joint probability of the two events would equal almost 75%.



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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

DIFFICULT

+ ANSWERING TIPS

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Describe a time when you failed to meet your goals?

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all – in which case you fail by default”

J.K. Rowling

Some failure in life is inevitable. Those who are brave and bold attempt many new things and thus fail much more often. Don't be afraid to explain a time when you wanted to achieve something, but you were not able to do it. Chances are that the interviewer is more interested in learning how you handled the failure that you experienced. He wants to know whether you learned from your mistakes and whether you are motivated to succeed in the future. When you think of a story, don't pick a major failure and try to choose a story where external factors influenced your failure as well. Inexperience on your part is OK too, given that you are in the early stages of your career. Don't point out as a reason for your failure qualities that can have a negative impact on your work in the future (for example attention to detail, ability to handle pressure, etc.).

It is very important to show that you turned a negative situation into a valuable learning experience. This will make a great impression to the Interviewer.

Example:

Last year, I was eager to find a summer internship opportunity, but I wasn't able to do that. One of the main reasons behind this was the tough job market that we are currently facing. Along with that, I believe I was too inexperienced and did not realize how difficult it was to find a good opportunity.

This year I had a totally different approach. I learned my lesson perfectly. I started preparing myself from November. I created a shortlist of opportunities that I wanted to pursue, researched all potential employers and chose the ones that were really interesting. I had more time to work on my CV and Cover Letters and to prepare for interviews. I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice.

What is your greatest weakness?

The problem with this question is that you are being asked about your shortcomings, while you are doing an interview and you want to make a good impression. Make sure that you don't choose something that can impede you from being great at the job you are interviewing for. For example, if you are interviewing for a controller or a financial analyst, it is OK to say that you do not like to speak in public. However, if you are applying for a consulting or an investment bank job you should not say that, because public speaking can be essential for those professions.

Choose a weakness that you can turn into a positive. "I am usually not good at...but I am making an effort to improve that". Avoid cliché answers like "I work too hard" and "I am a perfectionist". No one is perfect – that is why you need to indicate a weakness when you are asked about one. This shows that you are self-aware and have listened to feedback.

Example:

The tutor at my previous internship gave me some interesting feedback: "Don't try to do too much." I remembered that and had a chance to reflect on it, once the internship was over. He was right; I tried to do too much. I was eager to prove myself and implement everything that I learned in university so I could perform great. Trying to implement complex models and "doing too much" is something that I need to control in the future.

This experience allowed me to understand that greatness is a lot of small things done well.

Therefore, I decided that the next time when I am facing a similar situation, I will focus on my own duties and will make sure that I do everything that is expected of me well, instead of trying to invent the next formula of relativity.

What are your salary expectations?

There are several reasons why you don't want to answer this question:

- You can scare the employer by saying a number that is outside of their range
- You can undercut your salary by giving a low number
- You don't know how the other candidates responded to this question

Some people try avoiding this question by saying that money is not their prime motivation for this position or by asking the recruiter what the company's budget for this position is. These are valid tactics, but it is very likely that your employer insists on learning your salary expectations.

So the best thing that you can do is... to be prepared. Try doing the following:

- Research before the interview what is the average salary for this type of position (talk to friends and people who work in the industry, check out information on websites like [Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com))
- Base your salary range on the market for your skills
- Don't give a range unless you are willing to be offered its lower end

And lastly, if your interviewer insists on receiving a precise number, you should be ready to give him one.



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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

GUESSTIMATE

+ ANSWERING TIPS

365 Careers

How many flat screen TVs have been sold in Australia in the past 12 months?

The population of Australia is approximately 24 million. Let's assume that the average household comprises of 2 people (there are a lot of families with 3 or 4 people, but this is balanced by those people who are living alone). So the number of homes is 12 million (provided that all people have a home).

Then we need to find out how many of the TVs in these 12 million homes will need to be replaced with new ones. Let's assume that people need to replace their old TV with a new TV every six years and that every home has 1.5 TVs. Nowadays, it is reasonable to expect that all new TVs that are purchased have a flat screen. Therefore, the number of flat screen TVs that are purchased in Australia in one year is equal to:

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{1}{6} \text{ of the homes buy a new TV this year} & * 12 \text{ million homes} * 1.5 \text{ TVs per home} \\ & = 3 \text{ million flat screen TVs} \end{aligned}$$

How many gallons of white house paint are sold in the US every year?

Find the number of homes in the US: Assuming that there are 300 million people in the US and the average household contains 2.5 people then we can conclude that there are 120 million homes in the US.

Number of houses: Many people live in apartments and other types of buildings different than houses. Let's assume that the percentage of people living in houses is 50%. Hence, there are 60 million houses.

Houses that are painted in white: Although white is the most popular color, many people choose different paint colors for their houses or do not need to paint them (using other types of techniques in order to cover the external surface of the house). Let's hypothesize that 30% of all houses are painted in white, which makes 18 million houses that are painted in white.

Repainting: People need to repaint their houses after a given amount of years. For the purposes of this exercise, let's hypothesize that people repaint their houses once every 9 years, which means that every years 2 million houses are repainted in white.

I have never painted a house, but let's assume that in order to repaint a house you need 30 gallons of white paint. This means the total US market for white house paint is 60 million gallons.

What is the monthly profit of your favorite restaurant?

Pick a small family restaurant and not a chain of restaurants. This should make calculations much easier.

Then define the main parameters about the restaurant that we are talking about:

- Days of the week in which the restaurant is open
- Number of tables/seats
- Average number of visitors during lunch time
- Average number of visitors at dinner
- Average expenditure per client during lunch
- Average expenditure per client during dinner

The restaurant is open 6 days of the week (they are closed on Monday), which means that is open 25 times during lunch and dinner time per month. It is a small family restaurant with around 60 places. On average 30 customers visit the restaurant at lunch and 40 people come to have dinner. The typical lunch menu costs 10 euro, while a dinner at this restaurant costs twice that amount – 20 euro. Therefore, they are able to achieve revenues of:

$$25 \text{ (days)} * 30 \text{ (customers)} * 10 \text{ (EUR)} = 7,500 \text{ EUR (lunch)}$$

$$25 \text{ (days)} * 40 \text{ (customers)} * 20 \text{ (EUR)} = 20,000 \text{ EUR (dinner)}$$

The restaurant is able to achieve 27,500 EUR of sales. Besides, the owner and his wife 4 people work there as well. Let's say that the 3 waiters make 2,000 EUR each and the chef makes 3,000 EUR (including social security contributions). So the cost of personnel is 9,000 EUR. Usually, food and drinks cost around one third of the overall amount of sales. Therefore Cost of goods sold amounts to 9,125 EUR. Utility and other expenses are another 10% of Sales, so we will have an additional cost of 2,750 EUR. The owners do not pay rent, because they own the place. After the calculations that we made, it results in a monthly profit of (before taxes) 6,625 EUR.

How different are you, *really*,
from your competitors?

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUALIFICATION

+ ANSWERING TIPS

365 Careers

How do you handle working with numbers/clients/multiple tasks/stress?

Each of these aspects can be really important for a given position and the Hiring Manager will want to make sure that you are the right person that he/she is looking for. Try to figure out the most important characteristics of the job that you are applying for. Are you expected to do multi-tasking? What part of your overall responsibilities would be related to financial figures? Are you going to interact with many people?

Based on your findings, you will know what to expect. Prepare good examples from your past that can serve as proof of your statements.

How would you add value to our company?

Did you see “The Wolf of Wall Street”? Remember Jordan Belfort’s famous quote “sell me this pen”? The same principle applies to this question as well, although instead of selling a pen, you need to sell the idea of you landing the job. This is what the recruiter is asking you to do. You need to convince him/her that you will add value to the company. But, how are you going to be able to tell how you would add value to the company before having worked for the company?

Most candidates will start by listing their qualifications, work experience, personal traits, achievements, and they will be hoping to push the right button, somewhere along the way. Similarly, when facing the “sell me this pen” task, most people start describing the pen’s attributes; it is a great pen, writes very well, it is very shiny and smooth, etc.

It is natural to focus on your qualities and qualifications when asked how are you going to add value to the company. However, this is a trap. Most people would do just that. They will explain that they are great and that they are qualified. But that fails to answer the question itself, right? How are you going to add value? Analogically, the person who is being sold a pen can ask “Why do I need this pen?” Instead of falling for this trap and responding like everybody else, you can instead show that you are different by using an alternative approach.

Turn this into a back and forth dialogue and figure out what value needs to be added to the team that you will be joining. What does the company need? Are there any supplementary skills that are missing? Is there a particular area that they would like to reinforce? Learn more about the Interviewer’s take on the current situation and understand precisely what is expected from you. Don’t be shy to ask about the company’s mid-term strategy and the type of people that they will need in the future. Then you can nail the question by pointing out how your qualifications and motivation match with the needs that they have.

The whole dynamic of this type of question is driven by the fact that before you are able to sell a pen, you have to know more about the person who is going to buy it, what are his needs and what kind of pens is he usually writing with. Once you have positively identified a need, you can point out that your product is the right solution for that need.

Tell me about yourself

This will probably be the very first question of the interview. A very generic question, which is tougher than it sounds. You need to avoid telling the story of your life, but you don't want to pause after three sentences either. Given that it is the opening question of the interview, your answer becomes even more important, as it sets the tone for the rest of the conversation. The Hiring Manager is interested in seeing whether you will strongly structure the answer of a very broad question.

The secret for responding well to this question is scripting and practicing before every interview. What should you include in your response?

- Tell the interviewer only facts that you want him/her to know
- Give a hint about your personal life with one or two sentences (“I was born and raised in the UK”, “I moved to New York because it is a vibrant city and I like the dynamic environment.”)
- Show that you are a perfect fit for the job under consideration; you have the right education, your previous work experiences will be a valuable asset to the firm
- Conclude by explaining why are you excited about this possibility and how your strengths match with the profile that the company is looking for

Prepare a script that addresses each of the points above and practice answering the “Tell me about yourself” question, as you know it's coming your way once an interview starts.

What is/(are) your greatest strength/(s)?

A question that leaves a much more pleasant flavor than “What is your biggest weakness?” Nevertheless, you need to prepare to answer it, because it is an important one and it comes up at almost all HR interviews.

Think of the role you are applying for. What are the greatest strengths that someone who wants to be successful in this position must have? Let’s say that that you are interviewing for the position of Project Manager. A Project Manager needs to be a great:

- Communicator
- Motivator
- Team player
- Problem Solver

If the Interviewer asks you for your greatest strength (singular) pick one of these qualities. The one that is in fact your greatest strength and make sure that you have a great story illustrating that you are really good at this skill. If you are asked to list multiple strengths, you can pick up to three of these qualities. Don’t list more than three strengths, as it will come off as though you are strong with everything, which will dilute the effect that you obtained in the first place.

Avoid vague words (such as maybe, probably, guess, usually) when you talk about your biggest strength/s.

What motivates you about this position?

By asking this question, the recruiter wants to understand whether you are excited about the new opportunity that lies ahead of you. Your enthusiasm, of course, is highly correlated with the amount of effort you will put once the job is offered.

A motivated person would try to be proactive and create a positive working environment, which is precisely what every company needs. The real question isn't whether you should say that you are motivated. Of course you should. You need to think of a way that would best show that you are genuinely interested in the position under consideration. There are a lot of different things that can motivate you:

- The learning opportunities that you will have on the job
- Future growth prospects
- You like the team that you will be inserted in (if you have met them)
- You share the company's values/mission
- The company operates in a dynamic, ever-changing industry
- The company's prestige

Of course, remuneration is one of the main motivators for almost all people. However, talking about money is not a good idea at this point of the selection process. Instead, focus on some of the aspects that we listed above and customize them to the specific position that you are applying for.

What you say while answering this question is not the only important thing. Your interviewer will be eager to see that all signs point in the same direction. Try to show that you are excited through your voice, posture and body language. This can be the critical difference that will determine whether or not you will be selected.

What relevant work experience do you have?

A straightforward question, which leaves little space for maneuvering. Make sure that you are well prepared before the interview. Carefully study the job description and identify how your work experience is going to be useful in handling the responsibilities at this new position. Try to be specific and point out, which are the activities that you learned to do in your previous jobs and how they would allow you to perform well at this new position.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

A potentially dangerous question. The interviewer wants to know whether the company would be able to count on you in the long run - whether you are looking for a job to tide you over or for a career. Besides hiring someone that is qualified and skilled, most firms want to choose a person that believes in a future with the company. They don't want to invest a great deal of time and money in order to recruit and train someone who will leave in two years.

The hiring manager wants to understand exactly how you think. Perhaps you intend to gain one or two years of practical work experience and join your family's business. Maybe you want to start your own company, or maybe you believe that one or two years at this job would allow you to pursue much more interesting opportunities with other companies. This is why you need to be prepared and have a good answer in mind.

Instead of replying where you will be in 5 years, which is kind of dangerous for the above mentioned reasons, you can talk about exactly what you would like to learn in the next five years. You can say that you want to become very good at what you do, gain hands-on practical experience in managing people and that you always wanted to become a technical expert in the field for which you are interviewing. As a closing statement, you can add that you are excited about this opportunity because you believe that it is a step in the right direction and would allow you to achieve your goals.

By spinning the question in this direction, you are able to achieve three things. First, you protect yourself from answering a potentially dangerous question. Second, you will be able to emphasize that the main driver in your career is professional growth and self-improvement. And third – you are able to affirm that you are excited about the job opportunity. Sounds good, right?

Similar versions of this question are “What do you want to achieve in your career?”, “Describe your ideal job”, “What are your long-term career goals?” The same logic applies for all of these questions too.

Why should we hire you?

This question is very similar to “How would you add value to our company”. The Hiring Manager challenges you to sell him/her the idea of you being hired. Your profile is the product that needs to be sold. Remember the example that we gave with the pen?

Most people will start listing their qualities and qualifications, hoping that they will touch the right nerve along the way. But that is not the way to go. The Hiring Manager has read your CV, he/she already knows about your credentials. What he/she wants to understand is whether you can handle a tough question and be persuasive while making a valid point. Try to open your answer with a question instead:

Manager: Let me ask you, with so many people applying for this job, why should we hire you?

Job-Seeker: A great question. But I would like to ask you something as well. Can I?

Manager: Sure, go ahead.

Job-Seeker: What makes a great Analyst with your firm?

Manager: We are looking for people who are very independent and are able to learn fast, even when they are under pressure. Does that make sense?

Job-Seeker: Sure, it does. I can imagine that the environment in which your firm operates requires such qualities. This is precisely what made me apply for this position in the first place. I want to be a part of your dynamic environment. I am able to learn fast and adapt to changing circumstances quite easily. For example, ...

Sounds much better, right? In order to respond successfully to this question, you need to communicate well with the interviewer and understand exactly what they are looking for.

Otherwise, you simply don't know why they should hire you, leaving your answer to be a shot in the dark.



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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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What would you do if the priorities of an important project you were working on suddenly changed?

It's a very broad question, isn't it? Try answering by asking some questions that can guide you to the right answer:

- Who changed the project's priorities? Your boss? Clients? Suppliers? External Factors?
- Why did they change priorities?

Try to understand the reason behind the decision and assess whether it is a valid one. Is there something that you can do about it?

If you believe that you can propose a solution, don't be shy about contacting the responsible manager and sharing your idea.

If you believe that the reason for shifting priorities is not valid, raise your concerns with Management.

If there is nothing to do about the decision (external factors that can't be changed are the reason or your Boss says that despite your concerns, the decision to change priorities remains), create a course of action and make sure that everybody on your team is aligned with the new priorities. Schedule a reasonable deadline and think of the best way that you can achieve the new goals.

What would you do if a colleague was using a company phone for personal use?

These types of questions about the unethical behavior of one of your colleagues are difficult to answer. First of all, it is a very awkward situation. Most people don't want to rat their co-workers, but are not OK with unethical behavior neither. That means that they need to make a tough decision between two conflicting actions.

Depending on how serious and unethical the actions of your colleague are, you usually have two options:

- Talk with them before reporting to the manager and try to convince them to change their behavior
- Report them directly to the manager

In this case, given that a personal phone call from a company phone is not something that endangers the company and its reputation in the long run, you might try to fix the issue yourself by talking to your colleague and explaining to him that using the company phone for private conversations is not allowed. Strengthen your argument by saying that if everybody started doing such things, the company would eventually go bankrupt. Furthermore, he is setting a wrong example to the rest of your colleagues. Given that the company trusted you with this job, you need to repay that with solid work and consistently ethical behavior. If the pattern continues even after you talked to your colleague, you should contact Management.

Had the question involved a more serious violation (sexual harassment, stealing, disclosure of confidential information, etc.) you need to demonstrate your readiness to report the issue directly to your supervisor.

How would you deal with a significant mistake at work?

The best way to deal with a mistake at work is to own up to it. Otherwise, it will haunt you and will probably transform into something that cannot be fixed. A timely reaction could prevent the damage deriving from your mistake and shows strength of character.

One of the worst things that can happen to you is to have a manager who has lost trust in your work. Hiding mistakes can cause that. It will be much better to confront your manager immediately and admit that you made a mistake. Then, once he knows about the situation, he will be able to take appropriate action in order to resolve the situation. It is more likely that he will know how to address the issue because he is more experienced than you.

The more subtle aspect of this question is about how you learn from significant mistakes. Are you going to remember that mistake and learn from it in the future? Are you going to do everything possible in order to avoid it in the future? What type of precautionary measures would you take? Everybody makes mistakes, yes. The important thing is that you show that you are determined to learn from yours.

What would you do if one of your colleagues was not performing well?

Open communication is the best way to address problems when you are working with people. Remember that. By openly sharing your concerns with your colleague and hearing his opinion, you will make sure that both of you are on the same page about the current situation. You need to fully understand what caused his weak performance. It could be due to:

- Misunderstanding of his tasks
- Lack of experience in handling this type of tasks
- Personal problems
- Anxiousness to do too much

Then, once you have figured out what the problem is, the next step is to figure out a way to resolve the issue.

For example, you can propose the following solutions:

- Misunderstanding of his tasks – Go through his tasks together and tackle any problematic areas
- Lack of experience in handling this type of task – Depending on the knowledge gap and the deadline that you have you can i) propose to go through the unfamiliar topics together ii) propose to change his assignment with something that he is familiar with and where he can excel
- Personal problems – Offer flexible hours or suggest that he asks the manager for help and explain his personal situation; say that you are behind him and that everyone has difficulties at some point
- Anxiousness to do too much – Explain that the best employees are great at doing well the small things; assure him that he needs to focus on doing well his ordinary tasks without being distracted by issues that are outside of his current capabilities

What would you do if someone at work resisted your ideas?

Again, open communication is the best way to approach this problem. First of all, you need to make sure that you are fully explaining your ideas. Perhaps you can try an alternative approach? You can provide practical examples or make a list of the pros and cons of your suggestion. Then you should try to understand your colleague's point of view. What are the reasons behind his resistance? If his point is valid as well, think of an alternative approach together regarding the problem. Maybe you can create a hybrid solution that will include your ideas and will address his concerns.