

***THE BEST  
ANSWERS TO  
TOUGH  
INTERVIEW  
QUESTIONS***

BY : UNKNOWN AUTHOR

# The Best Answers to Tough Interview Questions

## Tell me about yourself.

This is really more of a request than a question. But these few words can put you on the spot in a way no question can. Many quickly lose control of the interview during the most critical time- the first five minutes. This is not the time to go into a lengthy history or wander off in different directions. Your response should be focused and purposeful. Communicate a pattern of interests and skills that relate to the position in question. Consider your response to this question as a commercial that sells your autobiography. Provide an answer that includes information about where you grew up, where you went to school, your initial work experience, additional education and special training, where you are now, and what you intend to do next. One of the most effective ways to prepare for this question is to develop a 60-second biographic sketch that emphasizes a pattern of interests, skills, and accomplishments. Focus your response around a common theme related to your major interests and skills. Take, for example, the following response, which emphasizes computers.

*"I was born in Canton, Ohio and attended Lincoln High School. Ever since I was a teenager, I tinkered with computers. It was my hobby, my passion, and my way of learning. Like most kids I enjoyed computer games. When my folks gave me a computer as a reward for making honor roll my sophomore year, I mastered DOS, Windows, and WordPerfect within six months. I then went on to teach myself programming basics.*

*By the time I graduated high school, I knew I wanted to study programming. From that point on, everything fell into place. My life revolved around computing. By my junior year at Syracuse, I decided I wanted to work for a major software manufacturer. That is why I had an internship last summer at FastTrack Software.*

*I now want to work for a major player so I can be at the forefront of breaking trends and new technology. When my college roommate told me about his start in your department, I hounded him until he helped me get a referral, which brought me here today.*

*I am prepared to answer any questions you may have about my education and experience."*

This response sets a nice tone for starting the interview. The interviewee is able to say a lot within 60 seconds by staying focused. The message is clear: the interviewee has both passion and focus relating to the position. He stays on message and concludes by leaving the door open for additional questions about his education and experience. Unfortunately some candidates get off on the wrong foot by rambling on for several minutes about their childhood, family, hobbies, travels, and interests.

Repeat Key Accomplishment Statements throughout the interview you will be asked numerous questions about your attitude and ability to do the job. Whenever possible, talk about your accomplishments in terms of what you did and the results of your actions for employers. Give examples of your effectiveness, which should include specific skills and statistics.

## Where do you see yourself five years from now?

This open-ended question is one of the most difficult and stressful ones job seekers face. Employers ostensibly ask this question because they are looking for people who know what they want to do and who are focused on specific professional goals. If you lack goals, you will have difficulty answering this question. Be sure you arrive at the interview with a clear vision of what you want to do today, tomorrow and five years from now. Be consistent with the objective on your resume and the skills and accomplishments you're communicating to the interviewer. Your answer should be employer-centered. For example,

*"In five years I hope to be working with an employer in an increasingly responsible position, that enables me to utilize my talents and work closely with my colleagues in solving important problems. I see myself taking on new and exciting challenges in an enjoyable environment and hopefully this will be with your company."*

Do not indicate that you hope to start your own business, change careers, or go back to school. Such responses indicate a lack of long-term interest since you do not plan to be around for long. While some may respond that they honestly haven't really thought that far ahead, the interviewer infers that the applicant lacks vision and goals.

### **Describe a major goal you've set for yourself recently.**

Give an example of a goal you both set and achieved. Ideally, this should be a professional goal; such as improved time management skills, achieved new performance targets, or learned a new skill. A personal example can also be appropriate if it reinforces your pattern of accomplishments. For example, if you take a great deal of initiative and quickly move into leadership positions, you might use a personal example relating to your recent community work: organized a community walk-a-thon that raised \$30,000 in matching funds to purchase new computers for the local library. Talk about results of achieving your goal. This indicates you set realistic goals and that you can focus on outcomes. Select an example that has interesting outcomes related to your efforts. The example should showcase your skills and abilities.

### **Now that you've had a chance to learn more about us, what would you change about our company?**

Be careful here. Most companies don't want you to come in and shake up the place. At the same time, they don't want someone who says, "Nothing, everything looks great here." Seek a middle ground by focusing on one or two non-threatening issues that may have come up in your discussions. For example,

*"From our discussion of the problem with the southwest accounts, I think we should look into the possibility of consolidating them the LA office. However, I think we need to do a thorough cost-benefit analysis of this region before making such a move. We may find the Phoenix office to be more beneficial."*

Such an answer indicates you are open to making changes but you also have a certain non-threatening decision-making style. Your response should sound sensible and innovative.

### **We all have weaknesses. What are some of your major weaknesses?**

This is not the time to confess all your problems nor to confidently say you have no weaknesses. The best way to handle this question is to mention personal weaknesses that are outside the job or a professional weakness that you have already improved upon. For example,

*"I have a real weakness for chocolate that tends to go right to my waist! I'm watching my calories carefully these days!" or "I've never been good with accounting. I'm glad this job doesn't involve accounting." Or "I have a tendency to take on too much on my own. I am working on this by delegating more."*

### **What type of decisions do you have difficulty making?**

Show that you are generally decisive but mention that there are situations that give you time to pause or you are learning how to better make decisions. For example,

*"I sometimes have difficulty choosing between two equally good ideas." or "I used to have difficulty saying 'no' to people until I learned to better set priorities."*

### **What is your biggest failure?**

Focus on something outside your work or something that happened on the job that you later fixed. Do not admit to any personal quality that might hamper job performance, such as procrastination, laziness or lack of concentration. Choose something that will not reflect badly on your ability to perform in the given position, such as one that took place early in your career. For example,

*"My biggest failure was not being selected as a SEAL because I was diagnosed with night vision problems. When I was 18, all I wanted to be was a SEAL. But I'm glad I didn't, because I may have overlooked an exciting career in information technology" or "When I was working at CL Advertising Associates, I lost the \$2 million Jettler account after only six weeks on the job! I felt awful and thought I would be fired. I was determined to get the account back and did after six months. Today the account makes up 1/3 of CL Advertising."*

### **What are the major reasons for your success?**

This is not the time to become extremely self-centered and arrogant. Keep in mind that employers are often looking for team players rather than Lone Rangers. A good response to this question may relate to a mentor/and or philosophy of work or the people you work with. Also, use this question as an opportunity to inquire about an appropriate "fit for success" with this company. For example,

*"Many years ago I learned an important lesson from Bob Nelson, who was my first supervisor and really became my most important mentor. He told me his secret to success was to 'Look at each day as a new opportunity to be your very best. Set high goals, be honest, never say no, and work with people who share your passion for doing their best.' I've always remembered that advice and try to live it every day. I am very self motivated, determined and honest. I really love what I do and I try to surround myself with people who share similar passions. I thrive on this type of environment. Am I likely to find this environment with your company? Can you tell me a little more about the characteristics of successful people at your company? What do you see as some of the key success factors for this position?"*

### **We're considering two other candidates for this position. Why should we hire you rather than someone else?**

Do not be distracted by the mention of two other candidates, you don't know anything about them and they could be fictitious. Focus on what strengths you bring to the table. These should be consistent with the four things most employers are looking for in candidates during the job interview: competence, professionalism, enthusiasm, and likability. Remember, they are looking for chemistry between you and them. Be prepared to summarize in 60 seconds why you are the best candidate for the job. Also, let the employer know you want the job and you will enjoy working with them. A lack of interest in the job may indicate a lack of enthusiasm for the job and them.

### **How do you spend your free time?**

This question may have several purposes. The interviewer may be just curious about your personal life without getting into illegal questions. He may also want to know how well rounded you are in your personal and professional lives. Focus on some of the standard hobbies or activities that most people engage in: golf, tennis, boating, reading, music, opera, collecting, gardening, or cooking. If you are

operating a home-based business as a sideline, you may not want to reveal your entrepreneurial spirit-it may indicate you are planning to leave and go solo as soon as the business starts doing well.

Source: Haldane's Best Answers to Tough Interview Questions, Bernard Haldane Associates, 2000.

### **Why do you want to work in this industry?**

Tell a story about how you first became interested in this type of work. Point out any similarities between the job you're interviewing for and your current or most recent job. Provide proof that you aren't simply shopping in this interview. Make your passions for your work a theme that you allude to continually throughout the interview.

*"I've always wanted to work in an industry that makes tools. One of my hobbies is home-improvement projects, so I've collected a number of saws manufactured by your company. I could be an accountant anywhere, but I'd rather work for a company whose products I trust."*

### **How do you stay current?**

Demonstrate natural interest in the industry or career field by describing publications or trade associations that are compatible with your goal.

*"I pore over the Wall Street Journal, the Times, Institutional Investor, and several mutual fund newsletters. And I have a number of friends who are analysts."*

### **Why do you think this industry would sustain your interest in the long haul?**

What expectations or projects do you have for the business that would enable you to grow without necessarily advancing? What excites you about the business? What proof can you offer that your interest has already come from a deep curiosity-perhaps going back at least a few years-rather than a current whim you'll outgrow?

*"The technology in the industry is changing so rapidly that I see lots of room for job enhancement regardless of promotions. I'm particularly interested in the many applications for multimedia as a training tool."*

### **Where do you want to be in five years?**

Don't give specific time frames or job titles. Talk about what you enjoy, skills that are natural to you, realistic problems or opportunities you'd expect in your chosen field or industry, and what you hope to learn from those experiences. You shouldn't discuss your goals in a field or industry unrelated to the job you're applying for. This may sound obvious, but too many candidates make this mistake, unwittingly demonstrating a real lack of interest in their current field or industry. Needless to say, such a gaffe will immediately eliminate you from further consideration.

*"I'd like to have the opportunity to work in a plant as well as at the home office. I also hope to develop my management skills, perhaps by managing a small staff."*

### **Describe your ideal career.**

Talk about what you enjoy, skills that are natural to you, realistic problems or opportunities you'd expect in this particular job or industry, and what you hope to learn from those experiences. Avoid mentioning specific time frames or job titles.

*"I'd like to stay in a field related to training no matter what happens. I was too interested in business to work at a university, but I believe that teaching is somehow in my blood. I've been good at sales because I took the time to educate my clients. Now I look forward to training the new hires."*

### **Tell me something about yourself that I didn't know from reading your resume.**

*Don't just repeat what's on your resume.* Think of a talent or skill that didn't quite fit into your employment history, but that's unique and reveals something intriguing about your personality or past experience.

*"You wouldn't know that I've managed my own small portfolio since I was sixteen, but I believe that it's important for you to understand my interest in investment sales. I've averaged a 12 percent return over the past eight years."*

### **Tell me what you know about this company.**

Describe your first encounter or a recent encounter with the company or its products and services. What would be particularly motivating to you about working there as opposed to working the same type of job in a different company? The recruiter will look for evidence of genuine interest and more than just surface research on the company. Reciting the annual report isn't likely to impress most recruiters, but feedback from customers and employees will.

*"I served as an intern to a restaurant analyst last summer, so I followed all the steak-house chains closely. What you've done especially well is focus on a limited menu with great consistency among locations; the business traveler trusts your product anywhere in the U.S. I'm particularly interested in your real-estate finance group and expansion plans."*

### **What have you learned about our company from customers, employees, or others?**

Describe how your interest has grown from personal dealings with the company representatives. Think creatively in preparing for job interviews. For example, prior to your job interview, speak with retailers or workers at other distribution points about the company's product line. What can they tell you? Give one or two examples of what you've learned to explain why you're interested in this company. What's the most compelling example you can describe to prove your interest?

*"I actually called several of the key accountants mentioned in your brochure. Two of the customers I spoke with explained why they continued to buy from you year after year. Your distribution operation is phenomenal. Are there any service improvements you think could still be made?"*

### **Tell me what you think our distinctive advantage is within the industry.**

Describe things you believe the company does very well, particularly compared to its competition. Explain how the financial strength of the company is important.

*"With your low-cost-producer status and headquarters operation in a low-cost area of the country, you seem in a better position to be able to spend aggressively on R&D, even in a down year compared to your closest rival."*

### **What other firms are you interviewing with, and for what positions?**

Often the candidate will try to impress the employer by naming some large firms in unrelated industries with completely different types of jobs. This is a big mistake! What employers want to hear is that you're interviewing for similar jobs in the same industry at similar firms (such as their competitors). This illustrates that you're committed to finding a job in your field of interest and are likely to be a low-risk hire.

*"Actually, I've definitely decided to pursue a career as a restaurant manager, so I'm applying for restaurant management-training programs. I've recently had interviews with several other large national fast-food chains, such as Super Burger and Clackey's Chicken."*

### **Do you believe you're overqualified for this position?**

Most people don't expect to be asked if they have a great deal of experience. This question could quite easily catch a candidate off guard, which is exactly the interviewer's intention. The candidate doesn't hesitate in answering this question and shows complete confidence in his or her ability.

*"Not at all. My experience and qualifications make me do my job only better, and in my opinion, my good design skills help to sell more books. My business experience helps me run the art department in a cost-efficient manner, thus saving the company money. Finally, I think I'm able to attract better freelance talent because of all my industry contacts. My qualifications are better for your company, too, since you'll be getting a better return for your investment. Again, I'm interested in establishing a long-term relationship with my employer, and if I did well, I would expect expanded responsibilities that could make use of even other skills."*

### **What would you do if one of our competitors offered you a position?**

The interviewer is trying to determine whether the candidate is truly interested in the industry and company, or whether he or she has chosen the company randomly. Contrast your perceptions of the company with its competitors, and talk about the company's products or services that you've encountered. In the long run, which players do you believe are most viable and why? This is also a good place to ask the interviewer for his or her opinion.

*"I'd say no. I'm not interested in other players in this industry. I want to work for Nike because I won a number of races wearing the Nike brand. Because of my positive experience with Nike, I know I'd be convincing selling your product to retailers."*

### **What's your dream job?**

This is your ideal chance to sell your aptitudes that fit the job description. Show an interest in finding new ways these skills can be put to use in a new job with additional responsibilities. Tie in the industry, size of company, or other factors where appropriate.

*"My dream job would include all of the responsibilities and duties in this position you're trying to fill. I also thrive in a fast-changing environment where there's business growth. Your plans call for expanding internationally during the next year, and this would satisfy one of my ultimate goals of being involved in an international corporation."*

### **What motivates you to do this kind of work?**

The interviewer will want to know about your belief in the products or services of the company. Use personal experience to demonstrate your interests and strengths. In an interview for your ideal job, you'd be highly motivated to get paid for working at something you liked. The interviewer will want to know if your natural interests are compatible with its particular job.

*"I've been fortunate in my own schooling; I had wonderful teachers. I want to be that same kind of teacher—who not only encourages kids to learn but also sets an example that inspires others to want to teach. In the long run, that's our best chance of turning around the quality of education in this state."*

### **Why should I hire you?**

Don't repeat your resume or employment history. Offer one or two examples to explain why you're talking to this particular company. What's the most compelling example you can give to prove your interest? This question often remains unasked, but it's always in the back of the recruiter's mind. Even if this question isn't asked, you should find an opportunity to use your prepared response sometime during the interview, perhaps in your closing remarks.

*"My uncle had a company that was a small-scale manufacturer in the industry, and although he later sold the business, I worked there for five summers doing all sorts of odd jobs. For that reason I believe I know this business from the ground up, and you can be assured that I know what I'd be getting into as a plant manager here."*

### **What are your strengths?**

Describe two or three skills you have that are most relevant to the job. Avoid clichés or generalities; offer specific evidence. Describe new ways these skills could be put to use in the new position. If you have to talk about weaknesses, be honest without shooting yourself in the foot—avoid pointing out a weakness that could be a major obstacle in landing the job. For example, it might be wise to mention you barely have the required work experience for the job; the interviewer has surely noticed this much, and then you can explain how you're qualified nonetheless.

*"My strengths are interpersonal skills, and I can usually win people over to my point of view. Also, I have good judgment about people and an intuitive sense of their talents and their ability to contribute to a given problem. These skills seem to me directly related to the job. I notice that you require three years' work experience for this job. Although my resume shows I've only two years' experience, it doesn't show that I took two evening college courses related to my field and have been active in one of the professional societies. I also try to gain knowledge by reading the industry's trade journals. I'm certain that my combined knowledge and skill level is the equivalent of that of other people who do have three years' of work experience. I'm also currently enrolled in a time-management course; I can already see the effects of this course at work on my present job."*



### **How do you explain your job success?**

Be candid without sounding arrogant. Mention observations other people have made about your work strengths or talents. This question is similar to the question "What sets you apart from the crowd?"

*"I never assume our customers are satisfied with our product, so I do my best to follow up with every customer. This feedback has provided valuable insight into the quality and characteristics of our products. The customer, as well, always appreciates this follow-up, especially when something hasn't gone right and you still have the opportunity to correct it on a timely basis. In addition, I'm able to pass on information to our design and production units to help improve both process and product."*

### **Would your current boss describe you as the kind of employee who goes the extra mile?**

Be ready to offer proof that you persevere to see important projects through and to achieve important results. Share an example that demonstrates your dependability or willingness to tackle a tough project. If you describe "long hours of work," make sure you demonstrate that the hours were productive, and not just the result of poor time management.

*"Absolutely. In fact, on my annual evaluations she writes that I'm the most dependable and flexible person on her staff. I think this is mostly because of my ability to juggle and prioritize. Would you like an example?"*

### **Tell me about a time you didn't perform to your capabilities.**

This question forces the candidate to describe a negative situation. Do so in the context of an early career mistake based on inexperience; then demonstrate the better judgment you now have as a result of that learning experience.

*"The first time I had to give a presentation to our board, I failed to anticipate some of their questions. I was unprepared for anything other than what I wanted to report. Now my director and I brainstorm all the what-ifs in advance."*

### **How do you manage stress in your daily work?**

It might be helpful here to describe a stressful project you've worked on and the specific actions you took to organize each step and see the project through. How do you keep yourself calm and professional under pressure?

*"I try to get out for lunch at least once during the week to clear my head. I also have a personal rule that stops me from reacting to a problem until I feel calm about it. I think, then act-but I've learned to do that over time."*

### **How do you regroup when things haven't gone as planned?**

Describe a time when some obstacle forced you to change your original plan, but you were still able to achieve the desired result. Did you rally the support of others to make this happen? With hindsight, how might you have better predicted the obstacle?

*"I start by trying to imagine the worst possible outcome; then I back up and identify precautions I can take to avoid that scenario. In this way I usually end up with a result close to the original goal. The training example I described earlier is proof of that skill."*

### **Why is service such an important issue?**

The interviewer is trying to determine if the candidate understands the importance of customer service in establishing a positive image in the marketplace, and its impact on new business sales. Outstanding customer service is also a great help in establishing long-term clients and repeat business-the profitable company's bread and butter. The longer the relationship, the greater the possibility for profit.

*"Service is a major contributor to customer satisfaction. Just as important as, or maybe even more important than, cost. If a customer isn't receiving a level of service that meets or exceeds his or her expectations, that customer won't be a customer for very long. In addition, that customer's experience with your company may affect how potential customers in the marketplace view your company. People do talk and share information. This may affect not only profits but future sales as well. In many instances service may be the one thing that distinguishes a company from the competition. A bad reputation for service may compromise a company's position in the marketplace."*

### **Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate customer. How did you handle the situation?**

How you react when others lose their temper or become upset is very important in most positions, especially those in service industries. The interviewer will be looking for evidence of your aptitude for work that involves a great deal of contact with the public. Give an example of a time when you were faced with a difficult person and how you handled it. Your answer should illustrate your maturity, diplomacy, and awareness of the needs and feelings of others.

*"My customer service position at the telephone company involved dealing occasionally with irate customers. When that happened, I'd try to talk in a calm, even voice, in order to get the person to respond in a businesslike manner and focus on trying to resolve the situation. Most times I was able to rectify the problem and pacify the customer, but I remember one incident in particular in which the caller became verbally abusive. I tried to remain calm and professional and not to let my personal feelings enter into the situation. I didn't respond to the abuse, I just made a note of it and continued to help the customer as best I could. When the abuse persisted, however, I politely asked him to call back and ask for my manager, because at that point I knew I shouldn't resolve the problem."*

### **How do you manage your work week and make realistic deadlines?**

To answer this question effectively, describe in detail how you establish priorities, set deadlines, and determine schedules.

*"I always reserve two hours of dead time every day to handle any unanticipated problems that may occur. I used to plan for eight or nine hours of project time, but now I find that I'm able to manage my own projects, as well as whatever my boss and staff need from me."*

### **What personal skill or work habit have you struggled to improve?**

This question is similar to "Describe a professional skill you've developed in your most recent job." However, here you probably want to discuss an improvement from the earliest days of your career or from

your relatively distant past. Make sure you convince the interviewer that this particular work habit is no longer an obstacle.

*"I had to learn to say no. I used to be helpful to the point that other staff abused my goodwill. Now I offer to help by countering with something I'd like help on in return. On balance I believe the trade-off is more equitable, and cooperation in our office has improved over time."*

### **What color is your brain?**

Be aware that you'll probably be asked zany questions. The point is not to stump you, but to find out what makes you tick. When the standard interview questions are asked, people are prepared, and it's harder for the recruiter to get to know the real person. An advertising recruiter, for example, tries to avoid this. There is no right or wrong answer to this type of question. In fact, the recruiter won't even really care what your answer is. He or she just doesn't want to hear something like, "I don't know, I guess it's blue because that's the way I imagine it." The point is to see how creative you are and how you think. Be sure to explain why you answered the way you did.

*"My brain is red because I'm always hot. I'm always on fire with new plans and ideas."*

### **If you got on an elevator where everyone was facing the back, what would you do?**

Interviews in creative fields like advertising and graphic design are different from other types of job interviews. Advertising recruiters tend to have a different interview style and process, usually conducting more of a behavioral interview. Recruiters ask questions like these to figure out what your behavior might be in a particular real-life situation.

*"I think I'd face the front anyway and say aloud, 'It's really much more comfortable facing forward, you know.'"*

### **What's the most creative or innovative project you've worked on?**

Provide examples of your initiative and resourcefulness. Discuss how your leadership skills have helped you accomplish your goals. Give a specific example that shows a creative, new, or unusual approach to reaching your goals.

*"During my summer job at Cellular One, I noticed that the sales inquiries were distributed haphazardly to all the marketing assistants in the office. I decided to set up a system grouping inquiries according to region or according to company size. This approach enabled the entire marketing team to come up with better and more creative solutions to our sales problems."*

**Consider the following scenario: You're working late one evening and are the last person in the office. You answer an urgent telephone call to your supervisor from a sales rep who's currently meeting with a potential client. The sales rep needs an answer to a question to close the sale. Tomorrow will be too late. You have the expertise to answer the question, but it's beyond your normal level of authority. How do you respond?**

This response shows that the candidate is confident in his or her ability and can be counted on in an emergency. Similarly, your answer should indicate that you're not afraid to be the decision maker in a tough situation, even if the situation's beyond your normal level of authority.

*"I'd get all the pertinent information, taking well-documented notes. I'd answer the question based on my knowledge and the information provided. I'd leave my supervisor a note and fill him or her in on the details the next morning. I'd be sure to explain my decision, as well as the thought process behind it."*

### **Give me proof of your persuasiveness.**

This is a question about leadership, but try not to use an example in which you were the designated leader. If possible, describe a time when you didn't really have authority but instead used your powers of persuasion to get people on your side. Describe your goal and the outcome of your efforts. Why did people trust or believe you?

*"During my summer internship I was assigned the task of conducting a benchmarking study for all the communication expenditures for a major utility. I had to get the consensus of employees in several different departments. Unfortunately, they resented the fact that I was just a summer intern, and they refused to cooperate. I had to schedule individual meetings with every employee and persuade each one that I was doing what would be ultimately to his or her own department and to the company. After a frustrating month, I finally got everyone's cooperation, the project went flawlessly, and in the end I received a bonus for my efforts."*

### **What's your most productive or ideal work setting?**

The interviewer wants to know the impact that the candidate's working environment has on his or her job performance. How well would you fit the position, physical layout of the department, and attitudes of the particular work group? Emphasize your ability to work in a variety of settings and how you've managed to be productive in less-than-ideal work environments.

*"I like having at least one hour of uninterrupted time in the early morning to plan my day. I usually start around 7 a.m. Otherwise, I enjoy an office with open doors, constant feedback, and lots of energy and activity. It helps me work more productively when I sense how busy everyone else is, too."*

### **Do you prefer continuity in structure or frequent change in your daily work?**

Your answer should be consistent with the job description. Describe environments that have allowed you to remain interested and learn new things without getting bored.

*"I enjoy challenge and change, which is why I frequently ask for the tough assignments. The last two projects we discussed were ones that I asked for. I don't allow myself to get bored."*

### **What environments allow you to be especially effective?**

Emphasize your flexibility and your ability to work in many different types of environments. Your answer should not consist of a laundry list of requirements (private office, few interruptions, and so on) or the interviewer may conclude that you will be difficult to satisfy.

*"Although I can work effectively in most environments, I prefer environments where people are their own bosses, within reason. I like to have a goal but be able to draw my own map to get there. To accomplish goals, I rely on asking questions and finding people receptive, so cooperation and access are important to me in a work group."*

### **How will you complement this department?**

Describe how your personality and/or skills would help round out the department. What types of people enjoy working with you for hours at a time? How would the company's customers or clients react? Assure the interviewer that there will be no surprises about your work personality.

*"I enjoy an environment in which people bounce ideas off each other and have the flexibility to ask for help when they need it. I'm usually a great troubleshooter for PC problems in my office, and I'm often going to ask for help proofreading important memos. I believe in give-and-take."*

### **Whom did you choose as your references and why?**

The interviewer is looking for a logical mix of people without any obvious omissions. For example, a former sales person would do well to include a former salesperson as a reference. Describe what you'd expect each of your references to say. Include a diverse group-senior to junior, an associate from work, and old professor from college.

*"I selected a former boss, a peer, and customer as references, to demonstrate that I'm a pretty well-rounded person and get along with all the important work associates in my life."*

### **Can we call all of your references?**

This is a question designed to protect you. If your current job employer doesn't know your looking for a new job (as is most often the case), you can request that the interviewer contact your current employer after you've accepted a position and given your notice to your current employer.

*"I'd prefer that you call my current boss only after you've made me a firm offer of employment and I've had a chance to tell her myself that I'm changing jobs. Then, of course, I understand your need to verify that my application was accurate."*

### **Are you most productive working alone or in a group?**

The interviewer is looking for someone who can work in an environment without the environment disrupting the candidate's preferred way of getting work done. Be honest but communicate that you're a flexible and reasonably adaptable employee.

*"I need some privacy time for planning, but otherwise I like the activity and noise of people around me and the ability to share ideas. I think most writers need reinforcement, because we all get writer's block occasionally."*

## **Tell me about an effective manager, supervisor, or other person in a leading role you've known.**

Talk about a supervisor's management style and interpersonal skills. Focus on the positive-how the person worked rather than what type of work he or she did. How was the person able to accomplish so much and get your support?

*"The best professor I ever had always reviewed the most important points from our last class before he moved on to new material. He also watched our faces carefully and repeated information whenever he saw a blank stare. Sometimes he would just ask for feedback by saying, 'What are you having difficulty with?'" He never assumed too much or made us feel dumb for not grasping a concept quickly."*

## **What type of people do you work with most effectively?**

Focus on the positive here. What type of boss, employee, and colleague would you be? Keep in mind that the interviewer wants to find out how well you would fit in with the other personalities in the company-not how well the other personalities in the company would suit you.

*"I tend to work well with people who are confident and straightforward. It's more difficult for me to be around timid people, because I move quickly and am decisive."*

## **What things impress you in colleagues?**

The recruiter will want to see how developed your interpersonal skills are. More than likely, you'll be interacting not only with your own department, but with other people in the company, and possibly colleagues. Show the recruiter that you will shine in this area.

*"I admire and work best with people who are of good character and have integrity. I also think confidence and enthusiasm is positive in any business environment."*

## **How do you organize and plan for major projects?**

Give the interviewer a good idea of your general approach to mastering complex tasks. You may wish to include here how you decide time frames, set deadlines, determine priorities, delegate tasks, and decide what to do for yourself.

*"I love to brainstorm a best, worst, and most likely scenario. Then I set out a timetable that's realistic. What I usually find is that some combination of my best and worst cases evolves; I can adjust my schedule easily as these things unfold because I've already visualized what could happen and how I'd react."*

## **What personal characteristics add to your effectiveness?**

Talk about what makes your personal style unique and effective. For example, how are you able to get cooperation from others? What specific skills and traits help you get results, and why?

*"I always stay in touch with my network. If I see an article that might be of interest to someone I know, I clip it and send it to that person. Then, when I need help and make a phone call to that person, the phone call gets returned promptly."*

### **How have your technical skills been an asset?**

Describe how you've used technical skills to solve a problem. Tell a specific story. Demonstrate how these same skills have been useful in other situations or in most of the jobs you've held. If you're hired, what situations will you handle particularly well?

*"Although I never planned on a career as a writer or publisher, much of my job in marketing has depended on good writing and creative layout skills. My part-time college job with a newspaper taught me a lot about desktop publishing, how to position something on a page effectively, and how to write short sentences with maximum impact. In all of my marketing jobs, I've been able to explain my goals clearly to graphic designers, which has helped me avoid costly design revisions."*

### **How do you usually go about solving a problem?**

The interviewer will want to hear the logic you use to solve problems as well as the outcomes you're able to achieve. Are you decisive? How do you narrow the options and make decisions? What do people say about your reasoning skills? What examples would they cite of your effective decision-making?

*"When I need to solve a problem, I generally start by writing down as many ideas as I can think of about possible causes. Next I look for relationships among causes so I can group together symptoms of bigger problems. Usually, after I study these groups of problems, the real cause becomes readily apparent."*

### **How practical or pragmatic are you?**

Give the interviewer an example of some practical or sensible approach you've used to solve a problem. When was a simple solution the best solution? Had others overlooked the obvious? In this example, you'll want to show off your commonsense skills rather than your academic skills.

*"I can usually pick up on an underlying problem, even if it's not too obvious. I recall an investment banker who visited our real-estate-finance class and asked us what might cause the Tokyo investment community a problem in attracting local investment dollars. A number of finance students in the class started trying to think of some complicated set of reasons. I decided it would have to do with getting out of a bad market quickly, and that a non-liquid investment would create problems. I said investors would be unsettled if the primary investment is local real estate and inflation has caused the paper value to exaggerate the real street value. As it ended up, that was the answer he wanted."*

### **Tell me about a time when there was no rule or precedent to help you attack a problem.**

Can you operate without structure? Describe your problem-solving process, especially the steps you took and measures you established in a particularly trying situation. Demonstrate confidence and the willingness to take on more challenges.

*"I was the first employee in a newly created position. I spent the first week developing an understanding of the history that had led to creation of the position. Only then did a method for setting priorities on the job become clear."*

### **What's your greatest achievement to date?**

Be sure that the achievement you describe here is relevant to the job you're interviewing for. Also, be careful that your answer doesn't sound as if the best is behind you. Mention something great that you've achieved, but clearly communicate your belief that the best is yet to come.

*"I'm proud of the fact that I graduated on time with a solid GPA while I played varsity basketball for four years. A lot of women on my team either took a reduced course load or let their grades suffer. I believe the reason I got through it all was sheer determination; I never even let myself visualize anything but finishing on time and with good grades. So I firmly believe, as a professional counselor, in the importance of a positive outlook."*

### **Tell me about something you accomplished that required discipline.**

This is your opportunity to discuss a skill you worked to develop, or a time when the quantity of your work required solid time-management skills. How did you remain focused?

*"I had to work two jobs to put myself through graduate school. I interned at the newspaper while I studied journalism during the week. Then on weekends, I sold real estate. Juggling those three schedules was a challenge, but I did it because it was important to me to graduate without school loans."*

### **Where do you hope that your career will have progressed to in the next few years?**

Avoid the temptation to suggest job titles; this makes you seem unbending and unrealistic, since you don't know how long it might have taken your interviewer to reach certain levels, and you wouldn't want to insult. Describe new experiences or responsibilities you'd like to add that build on the job you're applying for.

*"Over the next few years I'd like to have progressed to the point there I have bottom-line budget responsibility, and I'm also in charge of a production unit where I have labor-relations, quality-control, design, and manufacturing responsibilities. I believe this job will go a long way to helping me meet my career goals."*

### **Since this will be your first job, how do you know you'll like the career path?**

This can be a difficult question to answer convincingly, unless you've done a little bit of preparation. Discuss, for example, an internship or a conversation that's allowed you to assess the culture of the organization or to preview the work involved. Describe other people in the profession who have been mentors or who have taught you about the field. Also, point out why you're interested, how you learned more about the industry, and how you stay current with industry trends.

*"Although it's true that I've never worked a job in your industry, I've talked to many friends and alums at my school who've been successful in your company. I always ask them questions, 'What's the most frustrating thing about your job?' and 'What's the most rewarding thing about your job?' From the information I've gained, I'm confident that I'll be able to adapt quickly to your culture and will find the next few years rewarding, based on my goals and values."*

### **What are your aspirations beyond this job?**

Again, don't fall into the trap of specifying job titles. Stick to a natural progression you see as plausible. How should this job grow for the good of the organization? Then turn your attention once again to the job



at hand. If you seem too interested in what lies beyond this job, the interviewer will fear that you won't stick around for long.

*"Beyond this job as a marketing assistant, I see myself moving up through marketing analysis into brand management and eventually running a category. I'm aware that there are several skills I need to develop in the interval, and I believe with your continuing-education program and my own motivation for self-improvement, I'll have those skills when the opportunities arise for greater responsibility. That's why I'm determined to learn from the ground up, starting as a marketing assistant."*

### **How long do you think you'd continue to grow in this job?**

This is a variation on the question, "Where do you want to be in five years?" Be as specific as you can, considering what you know about the position. Don't mention a job title you'd want next, or the interviewer will wonder if you're already preoccupied with moving on.

*"My own personal measure of growth in a job is acquiring new skills, new knowledge, and new insights into the industry. As long as I can measure this type of growth, I consider myself successful. I'm a believer in stretching a job by reaching out to learn more about other areas that are peripheral to the job I'm in."*

### **Compare this job to others you're pursuing.**

Some consistency or thread of commonality among your other prospects is important here. Your choices must reflect your career aspirations. What common skills are clearly needed in all the jobs you're pursuing?

*"I've narrowed my job search to only those large securities firms within the finance industry. The basic skills necessary with all of these firms are similar: strong quantitative and analytical abilities, the ability to make decisions quickly, and good interpersonal skills to react to a customer's needs."*

### **Tell me about your salary expectations.**

A well-prepared candidate can effectively turn this question around. Ask first for the company's salary range, then answer in general terms based on your qualifications in relation to the job requirements.

*"I've become a little frustrated in the past year because the downturn in our industry has caused limited promotional opportunities. Based upon salary information published by our national association, the market price for someone with my experience and educational background is in the broad range of thirty to forty thousand dollars per year. Although I'm not certain how your salaries compare to the national norms, my feeling is that my value would certainly be in the upper half of this national range. I hope you'll share with me some of your salary ranges relative to the national norms."*

### **What do you reasonably expect to earn within five years?**

Again, turn this question around and ask what's typical for the career path. Then consider, based on your skills and performance, the areas you'll excel in. Leave it to the interviewer the appropriate time frames for promotions. Don't speculate, or you'll risk sounding arrogant, unrealistic, or the opposite-too reserved or too tentative.

*"My expectation for the next five years is that my contributions will be recognized and appropriately rewarded. I realize that salary levels are based on a number of factors, including the company's profitability and the general business cycle that affects our industry, but I expect to take on greater responsibility each year and to be appropriately compensated for my efforts and contributions."*

### **Other than work, tell me about an activity you've remained interested in over several years.**

The interviewer is looking here for a history of commitment over time, and consistency of interests. Do you sustain your hobbies over a period of time, or do you have a different hobby every year? Are your interests compatible with the job you're applying for? Would they be of value in any way to the company?

*"I've been involved in Cancer Society fundraising ever since my grandmother died from the disease. In the back of my mind I guess I'm hoping the research can lead to findings in time to save the life of someone else in my family."*

### **What do you enjoy in your spare time?**

The interviewer wants evidence that you're well rounded, not just one-dimensional. He or she is looking for shared interests or common ground. You should always, in some way, relate your answer to the job description.

*"I really enjoy getting outside-I often go camping and hiking. I've learned a lot about different fabrics that are good for various weather conditions. That's why I'm so interested in your textile operations."*

### **Do you live a balanced lifestyle?**

Do you have an outlet, a way to break from work, so that you show up each day refreshed and ready to perform at your highest level? Describe something specific that allows you to relax. Are your personal and career interests compatible in terms of their logic or thought process?

*"I make an effort to get out of the office at a reasonable hour twice a week. I go home and walk my dog. That's one of the most relaxing things I do, but it often helps me to think of solutions for problems at work, even though I'm not consciously trying to solve those problems."*

### **What outside activities complement your work interests?**

The interviewer is interested to see if the candidate's personality is reflected in both work and outside activities. Your answer to this question will shed light on your personality and thus possibly on your compatibility with the job.

*"I've always enjoyed tennis. In many ways it's a game of strategy and pacing. When something isn't working in the first set, you have to change your strategy for the second set. You also have to pace your energy in case you go to a third set, and constantly watch and read your opponent's reactions. I'm a gutsy tennis player-I go for the big points sometimes-but I'm careful with timing. That's the way I work, too."*

### **If you found yourself getting burned out, what would you do to revitalize your energy?**

Are you disciplined enough to avoid burnout? When you're not being productive, do you recognize it? What do you do to cope with stress?

*"I don't allow myself to get involved in a routine to the point that I get burned out. I've always been the type of person who asks for new assignments so that I stay motivated and interested."*

**Our company believes that employees should give back time to the community. How do you feel about it?**

Describe a time you gave something to a community or organization as a volunteer. Do you go above and beyond what's expected of you? Do you use your skills productively? Are you unselfish-a team player? Demonstrate how your personal interests make you productive even when you aren't being paid. What incentives other than a paycheck inspire you?

*"I believe that, too. In my last job as manager I told each of my employees that they could spend one Friday afternoon a month at a charity of their choice on company time as long as they weren't gone on the same Fridays. Ironically, productivity didn't decrease at all; they got more done in the morning-and I guess Friday afternoons weren't that productive to begin with. I've spent my afternoons with an adult reading program."*

**What community projects that can use your professional skills are particularly interesting to you?**

This interviewer wants to know if the candidate will be a good corporate citizen. The question also gives the interviewer a sense of the job seeker's values. Try to focus your answer on productive applications of your work-related skills. Don't get sidetracked describing a cause that doesn't demonstrate job-related skills. Avoid discussing any charity or organization that may be considered controversial.

*"As a marketing person, I've offered free advice to our local high school for its fund-raisers, as well as to a local real-estate office whose success could help my rural community's real-estate values."*

**Describe how a sport or hobby taught you a lesson in teamwork or discipline.**

Tell about a time you had to use teamwork to get a desired result. Tell a specific story, then explain how the same skill or lesson has been used in your work.

*"My football coach from high school taught me always to watch out for the other guy. If you do, he'll cover you when you need him to. I've applied that principle in all my work groups, especially on the trading floor."*

**When you aren't at work, do you prefer to stick to a schedule, or do you prefer to be spontaneous? Why?**

Be careful that, whichever answer you choose, it's consistent with the job you're interviewing for. For example, since accounting is a profession that requires discipline and precision, your answer should reflect your natural inclination toward agendas, schedules, and precision. However, for a sales job, you'd probably want to show that you're prepared to wing it. This question is essentially about your job personality but is also about your compatibility with the job.

*"My workday is very structured because I'm generally in four or five meetings a day. On the weekends, I like to have a plan, but not necessarily a set schedule. That in itself is a relaxing change of pace for me, but I feel I'd be wasting time with no plan at all."*

### **Tell me about an interest that you outgrew.**

Describe a former interest or hobby that you no longer pursue, making sure that the interest isn't related in some way to the job you're interviewing for. Talk about why you outgrew the interest and how it's not compatible with your current interests. Be sure to discuss how your current interests are related to your career.

*"Early on, I wanted to be a research physician. Then I spent time in a chemistry lab and realized I wasn't looking forward to the next two years of lab work. That's why I've chosen marketing for medical equipment instead. It combines my respect for the medical profession with a job that's more suited to my personality."*

### **What would you do if I told you that I thought you were giving a very poor interview today?**

Interviewers like to ask stress questions like these to see how well you hold up under pressure. Your best bet is to stay calm and relaxed; don't allow your confidence to be shaken.

*"Well the first thing I'd do is ask you if there was any specific part of the interview that you thought I might have mishandled. After that I'd think back and try to remember if there had been any faulty communication on my part. Then I'd try to review possible problems I had understanding your questions, and I'd ask for clarification if I needed it. Finally, if we had time, I'd try to respond more fully and appropriately to the problem areas you identified for me."*

### **Tell me about your most difficult work or personal experience.**

The interviewer will want to know how you hold up under pressure. Describe a situation, either personal or professional, that involved a great deal of conflict and challenge and placed you under an unusual amount of stress. What, specifically, were the problems, and what did you do to resolve them?

*"One time my coworker went through rehab for six months after a wreck, and I picked up a lot of additional work to help him out. I know he would've done the same for me, and it's important for me to have that kind of trust along the members of my work group."*

### **If this were your first annual review with our company, what would I be telling you right now?**

For this question you obviously want to present a positive impression. "I wish you would show up on time more," is definitely not a good answer. Remember to focus on one or two of your key strengths based on the personal themes you've developed.

*"You'd be thanking me for a job well done and would be explaining how you look forward to continuing to see good work from me. Furthermore, I would anticipate your explaining how you really appreciated my putting in extra time on some key projects and how my creative thinking helped come up with some innovative solutions to existing problems."*

**Give an example of a time when you were asked to accomplish a task but weren't given enough information. How did you resolve this problem?**

Although this example may seem trivial, the candidate demonstrates maturity and an ability to approach work conceptually. The interviewer will want to know that you understand that just getting the job done isn't enough. Your response should show resourcefulness and initiative.

*"At my last internship, my supervisor, an account executive, asked me to assemble five hundred press kits for a mailing. I wasn't sure in what order the pages and press releases should go, but my supervisor had already left for a client meeting. Afraid of putting the information together in the wrong order, I managed to track down her cell phone number and called her in her car. She explained the order of the materials over the phone, and in the end I managed to prevent a mistake that would have cost hours of work and a delay in the mailing-not to mention a few headaches."*

**How have you handled criticism of your work?**

The interviewer is looking for an indication of the candidate's accountability and professional character. Describe a specific project or work habit that caused you a problem until you faced up to it and overcame it. Alternatively, you might describe a time you responded objectively and professionally to particularly harsh or unreasonable criticism of your work.

*"I wasn't able to keep a good employee once who'd been in our manufacturing facility for ten years. His job description was rewritten to require computer skills. I offered to send him to night classes, but he refused the help. I had no option but to replace him. In retrospect if I'd encouraged him and other employees to acquire new training periodically, he might not have been overwhelmed by the time his position was reworked. Now I'm vigilant about encouraging my group to attend seminars and courses to enhance their job skills and to avoid becoming outdated."*

**Tell me about a situation that frustrated you at work.**

This is another question designed to probe the candidate's professional personality. The interviewer will want reassurance that you are able to hold up under pressure. Describe how you've remained diplomatic, objective, or professional in a difficult situation.

*"I was frustrated once when one of my clients, who'd insisted on a high-growth stock, called in a panic because the stock price had dropped more than twenty points in one day. I had a hard time convincing him to ride it out rather than cut his losses. This happened despite my attempts from the beginning to explain the short-term volatility of that stock."*

**Tell me about your least-favorite manager or professor.**

Answering this question will be a bit like walking across a loaded minefield, so be aware! Keep in mind that the interviewer doesn't want to learn about your former supervisors; he or she does want to learn about the way you speak about them. Though the interviewer may bait you to make a negative statement about your former employer, doing so can create a host of problems. Even if your claim is completely true and justified, the recruiter may conclude either that you don't get along with other people or that you shift blame to others. The best way around this dilemma is to choose an example that's not too negative, touch upon it briefly, then focus the rest of your answer on what you learned from the experience.

*"Well I've been pretty fortunate as far as managers go, and I didn't have any problems with my professors. In my first job out of college I worked with a manager who was pretty inaccessible. If you walked into his office to ask a question, you got the sense that you were bothering him, so we just learned to get help from each other instead. I wouldn't say he was my least-favorite manager, because he was a good manager in a lot of ways, but I would have preferred that he'd made himself more available to us and given us more direction."*

### **Who's the toughest employer you've ever had, and why?**

Again, you should avoid making negative statements about your previous employers, at all costs. Turn the question around with a positive, upbeat response, as this candidate does.

*"That would be Ms. Henson at Franklin Associates. She'd push people to their limits when things got busy, and she was a stickler for detail. But she was always fair, and she rewarded good, hard work. I'd call her a tough boss, but a good boss."*

### **Time management has become a necessary factor in productivity. Give an example of a time-management skill you've learned and applied at work.**

When answering this question, describe a time-management technique you've applied to work that's allowed you to save time and resources. In such areas as public relations time is precious, and the interviewer will want to see that you have an idea of how valuable your time is. Try to give an example that demonstrates how you've managed to increase productivity because of effective time management.

*"I regularly use scheduling software, which helps me effectively plan for the day, week, month, or year. It also has a to-do-list feature and an alarm option, which is helpful for meeting timely deadlines. In general, though, I'm very goal oriented and self-disciplined. I like to focus clearly on one project at a time for a set amount of hours. In the past I've found that this has helped me save time, which in turn has given me the opportunity to implement new procedures that have ultimately saved the department time and money."*

### **Would you be willing to locate to another city?**

You may, even in some first interviews, be asked questions that seem to elicit a tremendous commitment on your behalf, such as this one. Although such questions may be unfair during an initial job interview, you may well conclude that you have nothing to gain and everything to lose with a negative response. If you're asked such a question unexpectedly during an initial job interview, simply say something like "That's certainly a possibility" or "I'm willing to consider that."

Later, if you receive an offer, you can find out the specific work conditions and then decide if you wish to accept the position. Remember, at the job-offer stage you have the most negotiating power, and the employer may be willing to accommodate your needs. If that isn't the case, you might wish to explain that upon reflection, you've decided you can't (for instance) relocate but you'd like to be considered for other positions that might open up in the future.

*"I'd prefer to be based here, but it's certainly a possibility I'd be willing to consider."*

### **Would you be able to work extended hours as necessary to perform the job?**

Your response should match closely the position you're applying for and should reflect a realistic understanding of work and time required. Ask about seasonality of work, if you're unsure, and show a willingness to work occasional extended hours.

*"I'm accustomed to working long hours during the week. I usually work until at least six-thirty, because I get a lot done after the business office closes at five. I can make arrangements to be available on weekends, if necessary, though I do prefer to have at least twenty-four hours' notice."*

### **Sell me this stapler.**

With this kind of question the interviewer will want to determine how quickly you can think on your feet, as well as your ability to communicate effectively and succinctly. Be prepared to give a thirty-second speech on the benefits and advantages of virtually any common office object, from a paper clip to a telephone, particularly if you're interviewing for a sales position.

*"This is a professional-quality stapler, designed to be functional as well as attractive. It will help you reduce clutter by enabling you to fasten pages together. And since papers relating to the same subject will now be attached, you'll be more efficient and will save time searching for papers. Finally, its sleek shape and back color are coordinated to match the rest of your office furniture."*

### **What is your biggest weakness?**

This is a great example of what is known as a negative question. Negative questions are a favorite among interviewers, because they're effective for uncovering problems or weaknesses. The key to answering negative questions is to give them a positive spin. For this particular question your best bet is to admit to a weakness that isn't catastrophic, inconsistent, or currently disruptive to your chosen professional field, and to emphasize how you've overcome or minimized the problem. Whatever you do, don't answer this question with a copout like "I can't think of any," or even worse, "I don't really have any major weaknesses." This kind of a response is likely to eliminate you from contention.

*"I admit to being a bit of a perfectionist. I take a great deal of pride in my work and am committed to producing the highest-quality work I can. Sometimes if I'm not careful, though, I can go a bit overboard. I've learned that it's not always possible or even practical to try and perfect your work-sometimes you have to decide what's important and ignore the rest in order to be productive. It's a question of trade-offs. I also pay a lot of attention to pacing my work, so that I don't get too caught up in perfecting every last detail."*

### **Why weren't your grades better?**

It's likely that if you've made it to the interview stage, you fulfill the basic criteria for the position, including the education requirements. The recruiter is probably trying to judge here how well the candidate handles adversity. It's important not to get defensive or to place blame. Instead, try to put a positive spin on the question-for example, by concentrating on what you learned and the extra effort you put in, rather than on the grades you received.

*"School was a wonderful experience for me. I really enjoyed learning new ideas, I studied consistently, and I was attentive in class. But I never believed in cramming before the night of an exam just to get a higher grade or staying up all night to finish a term paper. I really believe I learned just as much as many students who went for the grades."*

### **Was there a course that you found particularly challenging?**

The interviewer will want to see how well you respond to difficult situations. Demonstrate that you won't fold in the face of difficulty, and that you're willing to put in the extra effort to meet a challenge.

*"Initially I was completely overwhelmed by the introductory chemistry course that I took last year. No matter how hard I studied, I seemed to be getting nowhere. I failed the first three quizzes. So I tried a new approach. Instead of just studying by myself, I asked a friend who's a chemistry major to help me with my studies. I also began to seek help from the professor after class. And I found that more time I spent in the lab was critical. I ended up with a B-plus in the course and thought I achieved a solid understanding of the material. More than that, I learned that tackling a new field of study sometimes requires a new approach, not just hard work, and that the help of others can be crucial!"*

### **Why didn't you participate more in extracurricular activities?**

The interviewer may be worried that if you don't have many outside interests, you may eventually suffer from burnout. Employers like candidates who are well rounded and have interests outside of work. If you didn't participate in formal extracurricular activities in college, you still may want to talk about some of your interests, such as reading or exercising, that you may have a passion for running even if you weren't on the college track team.

*"I wanted to give as much effort as possible to my studies. I came from a high school in a very small town, where I received a lot of A's, but this didn't prepare me well for college. So I studied hard. I have, however, found time to explore the city and make new friends, and I do socialize formally on the weekends."*



## Questions Asked By Employers

- What are your long range and short range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your business career?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- Which is more important to you, the money or type of job?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
- How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
- Why should I hire you?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in business?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
- What two to three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Why did you select your college or university?
- What led you to choose your field of major study?
- What college subjects did you like best? Why? Least? Why?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
- What changes would you make in your college or university? Why?
- Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
- Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested in? Why?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
- What do you know about our company?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
- Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What were your major courses of study in school? Why did you choose those courses?
- What was the most important thing you learned in school?

- Why did you decide to go to this University?
- Do you plan to finish your college degree while you are working?
- Did school meet your expectations? How did you pay for your college education?
- To what extent do your grades reflect how much you learned?
- What were your major responsibilities at your last job? At the one before that?
- Which of your previous jobs did you like (or dislike) most? Why?
- What was the most rewarding experience at work? What do you find most satisfying in a job?
- What was your single most important accomplishment for the company in your last job?
- Why did you leave your last job? Why do you want to change jobs?
- What was the toughest problem you had to solve? How did you solve it?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- This job means you will have to relocate; what problems do you foresee, if any?
- This job has a lot of travel; how will you handle that?
- After reading a description of the job, how do you see yourself fitting in with this job?
- What skills did you learn at your last job that you can use here?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- How do you think your education will help you on this job?
- What would you do if you were fired in two years?
- If you went to work for us today, what job would you like to hold in three years?
- How long do you plan on staying with us?
- What kinds of additional education, formal or informal, do you think you need to meet your career goals?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why did you choose our company?
- What are your career goals?
- Where do you expect to be in your career within five years?
- What are your educational goals?
- What future training do you plan in connection with your career goals?
- What are your lifetime goals?
- What do you know about the position you are interviewing for?
- What skills, experience, and training do you have that makes you qualified for this job?
- What other positions have you had that qualify you for this position?
- What have you contributed to your past employers that saved the company time, money, or enhanced its image?
- How many promotions did you receive at your last or present company?
- Why were you given these promotions at your present or last company?
- How many raises were given at your last position? Why were you given them?
- What did you learn in your last three positions?
- Why do you want to change careers?
- Have you had any supervisory or administrative experience? Please tell me more about it.
- What management style do you prefer?
- How are your people-management skills? Can you give me one or two examples?
- How well do you communicate in writing and orally? Give me some examples.
- Can you meet deadlines? If so, give me an example.
- Give me an example of a decision you made that benefited your company.
- What motivates you?
- How do you best motivate others?
- What clubs do you belong to?
- What volunteer work do you do or have you done in the past?
- What awards or honors have you received?
- What are your hobbies?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are your salary requirements?

- Have you ever done consulting work? If so, why and for whom?
- Have you written any articles for a professional journal, magazine, or newspaper?
- What civic organizations do you belong to?
- What professional associations do you belong to?
- What major strength do you feel you have that would make you a great (Manager, Sales Representative, Accountant, Analyst, etc)?
- Describe a situation where your work or an idea was criticized.
- Have you done the best work you are capable of doing?
- What problems do you have getting along with others?
- I'm not sure you're suitable for the job, what do you think?
- Tell me about something you are not proud of.
- What are some of the things your supervisor did that you disliked?
- What aspects of your job do you consider most crucial?
- What is your energy level like? Describe a typical day.
- Why do you want to work here?
- What kind of experience do you have for this job?
- Are you willing to go where the company sends you?
- What did you like/dislike about your last job?
- What is the least relevant job you have held?
- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- What are your biggest accomplishments?
- How do you organize and plan for major projects?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What are your outstanding qualities?
- What interests you most about this job?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- Describe a difficult problem you have had to deal with.
- What would your references say about you?
- Can we check your references?
- What was the last book you read (or movie you saw)? How did it affect you?
- How do you handle tension?
- How long have you been looking for a position?
- Have you ever been fired?
- How does this job compare with others you have applied for?
- How do you take direction?
- Rate yourself on a scale of one to ten.
- What kinds of things do you worry about?
- What is the most difficult situation you have faced?
- What are some of the things that bother you?
- What have you done that shows initiative?
- How interested are you in sports?
- Do you prefer working with others or alone?
- Explain your role as a group/team leader.
- How would you define a conducive work atmosphere?
- Define cooperation.
- What difficulties do you have tolerating people with different backgrounds and interests from yours?
- In hindsight, what have you done that was a little harebrained?
- What would you do when you have a decision to make and no procedure exists?
- What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
- Tell me about the problems you have had living within your means.
- What area of your skills/professional development do you want to improve at this time?
- Are you willing to take calculated risks when necessary?

- See this pen I am holding, sell it to me.
- What is the worst thing you have heard about our company?
- How do you handle rejection?
- Tell me about a time when you put your foot in your mouth.
- What interests you least about this job?
- What do you feel is a satisfactory attendance record?
- What are some of the things you find difficult to do? Why do you feel that way?
- What kind of people do you like to work with?
- What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with?
- How have you successfully worked with this difficult type of person?
- How would you evaluate me as an interviewer?
- We have tried to hire people from your major before, and they never seem to work out. What makes you different?
- Do you like routine tasks/regular hours?
- What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- What do you think determines progress in a good company?
- Do you think grades should be considered by first employers?
- Why do you think you would like this type of work?
- What would your ideal career position be?
- Do you consider yourself a leader, and if so, give me some examples of your leadership abilities?
- Do you consider yourself a better manager or a better implementer?
- What are your most significant achievements?
- Have you had any international experience? Do you speak or write in any foreign language?
- What can you offer us?
- Have you ever fired employees, and if so, how did you handle terminations?
- What do you feel is the most difficult responsibility that a manager/executive must perform?
- What is your definition of success and according to this definition, how successful have you been in your career?
- What are your long and short range plans?
- What were your favorite courses in school? Who were your favorite professors and why?
- Did you prepare your own resume?
- How long have you been engaged in your job search?
- Have you had any specific offers?
- Why haven't you found a position before now?
- What do you know about this company, and where did you find this information?
- How do you spend your time when you are not working?
- If you could begin your career over again, what would you do differently?
- How much do you think this position is worth?
- What is the hardest job you have ever performed?
- Do you object to taking psychological tests?
- What contributions do you think that you could make to this company?
- You seem overqualified for this position, what do you think?

## **Additional Questions You May be Asked**

### *Work History Questions:*

- I noticed that you were working for (your last job was with) \_\_\_\_\_. Why did you decide to work there?
- What exactly do (did) you do there?
- What do (did) you like about that job and company?
- What do (did) you not like?
- How do (did) you get along with your supervisor there?
- How do you think he or she would rate you?
- Would he or she recommend you for another job?
- What qualities do you look for in a supervisor?
- What type of people do you like to work with?
- Tell me about your successes in that job.
- Was your work ever criticized? If so, in what way? What did you do to improve?
- What kind of setting do you like to work in quiet or noisy? Alone or with others?
- In doing your job, do you think it's more important to finish quickly or do the work exactly right?

### *Education Questions:*

- I see you went to \_\_\_\_\_. Why did you pick that school?
- Would you go there again? If not, why? Where would you go instead?
- What do you feel were the most significant things you got out of going there?
- How did you happen to major in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Would you choose the same curriculum again? If not, what would you choose instead?
- In what subjects did you do best?
- What subjects gave you the most trouble?
- What was your overall average for class standings?
- Did you have any part-time jobs while you were going to school?
- How will your degree help you succeed in our company?
- Why aren't your grades higher?

### *Self-Evaluation Questions:*

- How do you feel you can contribute to this company?
- What do you hope to gain from working here?
- What do you feel are your outstanding qualities?
- When you analyze yourself in relation to work and other people, do you find areas that need improvement? If so, how would you go about it?
- What are your short and long range career objectives?
- Why do you want to change jobs?
- What will your last supervisor tell me are your two strongest/weakest areas?
- Tell me about a time when you had to delay finishing a task because you didn't have enough information to come to a good decision.
- Describe the best supervisor you've ever had.
- What do you really want to do in life?
- Have you ever hired or fired anyone?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Would you like to have your boss's job?
- Describe the kind of people that annoy you most. What type of people do you like working with?
- What interests you about this position?
- Give an example of a time when you were able to effectively communicate with another person even though that person may have disliked you?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Give an example of a time when you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or those you supervised.
- Why should I hire you rather than someone else for this position?
- How do you feel about your career progress to date?

- Give an example of a problem you had at work and tell me how you solved it.
- How has your past experience trained you for this career?
- What did you do on your last job in order to help build teamwork?
- What did you dislike/like about your last job?
- What are two things you wish to avoid in your next job?
- Describe an important goal that you've set in the past, and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- What kinds of decisions are hard for you?
- Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Describe the most significant written report/presentation that you had to complete.
- Tell me some specific techniques you used on your last job in order to improve your organizational and time management skills.
- What is the most creative work-related project you've been involved in?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Describe a time on any job when you've confronted problems/stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give me an example of a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy that you didn't agree with.
- What motivates you in a job and in personal life?
- What role do you take in a group situation? Give examples.
- Give an example of how you performed in a team situation.
- What are the biggest issues facing our industry and company today?
- What would you do to improve our company's position?
- What research have you done on our firm and our industry?
- Are you results oriented? Give some examples.
- How have you developed your interpersonal skills? Are they good?
- Describe your problem solving skills.
- Give me an example of a complex problem you solved.
- Give me an example of when you have failed and how you responded.
- Can you work under pressure? Give an example.
- What type of salary are you worth and why?
- What are the five biggest accomplishments of your life?
- How long would it take you to make a contribution to our company?
- If you could change something in the course of your life, what would you change?
- How would you rate yourself as a manager? As a worker?
- What were the development steps on your last performance appraisal?
- What new goals have you set for yourself? Why did you choose these?
- What did you think of your last boss?
- What did your subordinates think of you?
- Why haven't you obtained or accepted a job so far?
- What features of your previous jobs did you like and dislike?
- Describe your ideal picture of success.
- What interests you most about our position?
- What was the last book you read?
- What did you do on your last vacation?
- Wouldn't you be better off in a bigger (smaller) organization?
- Are you a leader? Give examples.
- Describe your personality.
- How have you increased profits in your past jobs?
- What qualities do you look for in hiring people? For this job?
- Describe the ideal employee.

- How have you improved yourself recently?
- What were your responsibilities in your campus activities?
- Describe your study habits.
- How do you change your style to work with people at all levels, from Vice Presidents to Secretaries?
- What other firms are you talking to and why?
- How would you decide between job offers from us and one of our competitors?
- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- What skills do you bring to us and how can you put them to work?
- Describe the time period and circumstances when you became self-supporting.
- Describe a goal you have set in the past and how successful have you been in working towards its accomplishment.
- Describe a time when you were under pressure to fulfill a commitment you made to do something in spite of difficulties.
- Describe a situation in which one of your decisions was challenged in a group. How did you react?
- Were you able to achieve the results you wanted?
- Describe a time when you had to be persuasive in getting your ideas across.
- Give me a question that you've never heard a recruiter ask you and you want to hear.
- Describe a situation in which you found yourself to be an analytical and thorough problem solver, and by solving the problem achieved good results.
- Describe when you used facts/figures to support your story to obtain a significant accomplishment in an important matter.
- It's hard to get a new idea accepted by others. Describe when you have had to do this.
- What are some things about yourself that you would like to improve?
- In order to be effective as a negotiator, it's important to not only be able to analyze your competition, but also be able to compromise. Describe an experience in negotiating that reflects your ability to compromise.
- Describe steps you have taken to address problem areas in some important matter.
- What are two or three things you would still like to learn in this field?
- What skills do you rely on most in your everyday work?
- What kind of training do you feel you would benefit from?
- How much supervision do you normally receive? Prefer?
- What kind of things come most naturally to you? Describe your biggest success.
- How do you feel about working in an unstructured environment? Why?
- What do you like most about your present job? What do you like least about it?
- What kinds of things give you the greatest satisfaction in your work? Least satisfaction?
- What steps have you taken in the last few years to develop your skills?
- In your opinion, what makes you different from the other applicants?
- What have been the most significant accomplishments in your life so far?
- What sort of decisions are easy for you to make? What sort of decisions are difficult for you to make?
- If we hire you for this job, what would we need to do to bring you up to speed?
- What has been your biggest frustration?
- If I spoke to a friend, what characteristics of yours would he or she like to see you change?
- To what extent would you say that your last job was a learning experience? Why?
- What changes have you dealt with in your current position? Describe the risks that you have taken in your last job, and tell me the outcome of these risks.