

# 50 PREDICTABLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Write down the questions you think you may be asked. Write down and edit answers you will give. Make sure your answers contain positives, not negatives. Be relevant and future orientated. Ensure that your responses provoke further questions, which will act as an enabling vehicle for you to get across selling points.

Know your weaknesses, because you must be able to defend them in a positive way. You must be able to counter any possible objections to the sale. Not all of the questions you anticipate will arise but this is an excellent way of preparing for the interview.

## 1. How was your journey?

## 2. Tell me about yourself?

*This is the archetypal blank cheque question. Interpret it as if they had said, "Tell me why I should employ you". Have a 2 minute talk prepared, the first minute of which accounts for the relevant details of your career to date, and the second minute of which tells them how that career equips you for this job. Once you have this short talk prepared you will only need to adjust it for subsequent meetings.*

## 3. What do you know about us?

*You must know something about them or you wouldn't be there. If you have carried out research as suggested then you will be prepared for this question. If they don't ask this question then you can ask a question which implies you know about them, e.g. "I noticed from your Annual Report.....".*

## 4. What do you look for in a job?

## 5. Why does this job interest you?

*You have presumably applied because you have the skills to do the job well. Outline what you see as their needs and reiterate how you can fulfil them. Your reasons for applying must emphasise what you can contribute and not what you can take. Let your competitors stress what the job can give them in terms of salary, job satisfaction or career progression. Try to imagine the questioner repeating your answer to their superior.*

## 6. Why are you leaving your present employer?

## 7. Why did you stay with them so long?

*Accusations of inertia are scant reward for years of loyal service to a past employer. If your career has not moved on apace with that employer then you could be in trouble. You might say "They were a good company to work for, and as you can see from my CV I didn't stand still. They were quick to recognise and encourage ability, and I never felt the need to develop my career outside the company.*

### 8. You seem to have done a lot of job hopping, why?

*It may seem as though you can't win! If you have moved from one employer to another in a series of unrelated and undistinguished moves, then again you have a problem. If they have been reasonably simple and logical career progressions then you simply say, "I don't like to stand still for too long. I have always found that in order to progress my career at the speed I want to go, I have had to move outside the company to do so. I would naturally prefer to expand my career within the same company, do you feel that I have this opportunity within your company?"*

### 9. We are really looking for a younger/older person

*If age were really a problem you would not have been invited for an interview. If you react aggressively or go on the defensive then they will know that this is your Achilles Heel. You will be transmitting signals which indicate to them that you do see it as a problem, in which case it will be.*

### 10. What is your greatest strength?

*The strong points you relate may not be your strongest points, but they will be your strongest points in relation to the job. Be specific and don't waffle on about adaptability, sense of humour or your ability to get on with people. Your answer must be work related and specific to this job and this company.*

### 11. What are your weaknesses?

*Do not deny any weaknesses, but give them a weakness that can be interpreted as a strength e.g. impatient, wanting things done, too demanding, wanting things perfect, always early etc.*

### 12. Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

*Keep an open mind. Don't pin yourself down to specific mythical jobs. Make the point that as long as you are getting results, making a contribution and learning new skills - that you see yourself still working for them. This is a particularly useful response if they might have perceived you as being a 'job-hopper'. Stating a specific and unrealistic objective will alert them to the fact they could not satisfy your career ambitions.*

### 13. What would you describe as your greatest achievement?

*Your greatest achievement may be a complete yawn for the interviewer, so make it relevant to the job, not the local Tango Dancing Competition. Be prepared to go for a lesser achievement if it is more relevant to their needs.*

### 14. What was your biggest mistake?

*Whatever you say it must show you in a good light. There is no point at all in quoting a mistake which was avoidable, your fault and disastrous in its consequences. Not pursuing educational qualifications could be seen as a mistake but if you have done well regardless this speaks highly of you. With a little thought you can turn this question to your favour.*

### 15. What major problems did you encounter in your last job?

*A good question to get and there is no mileage at all in your denying the existence of any problems. Of course they should not be problems you anticipated, or caused and neither will you apportion blame. Any cited problems must not reflect badly upon your previous employer. Make sure that the problem was overcome, that you were instrumental in overcoming it and that it required a range of skills for you to do so.*

### 16. What did you do to overcome them?

### 17. Are you having discussions with any other organisations?

*Of course you are. If you are not there is something wrong with your campaign. You are not obliged to tell them who you are talking to, but it may be in your interest to let them know if you are having meaningful discussions with a prestigious company, particularly if it happens to be one of their competition. They will then be anxious not to lose you. A negative answer will certainly weaken your position.*

**18. How does this job compare to your previous one ?**

**19. What does success mean to you?**

**20. Are you ambitious?**

*Be careful - this could be dangerous if you are getting on in years and your career to date shows a distinct lack of progression. Generally speaking employers like to see people who are content to stand still. A move should always be for a challenge. This need not mean that you want to be an MD, but it could be dangerous to indicate that you don't. Distinguish between ability and desire, ambition need not mean that you want to progress up the career ladder.*

**21. Would you say that you had an aggressive management style?**

*One's style of management is always of great interest. Are they seeking someone with a tough management style? The previous job holder may have been too aggressive, they won't want another one. On the other hand they might not want the silent type. If it is unclear what they want, your only certainty of staying in the game is to hedge your bet. "I believe I am adaptable enough to change style depending on the situation and the person". Some people respond well to a robust approach, but others need encouragement to perform well. Good managers should know what makes their staff tick and manage accordingly. If it becomes clear that they are seeking a style of management you cannot deliver, then consider the wisdom of accepting the position.*

**22. How would you describe your management style?**

**23. What qualities do you look for in a good manager?**

**24. Do you prefer working on your own or in a team?**

*If you know the job in question is autonomous or dependent upon team work, then this might determine your response. If you don't know then you could be, "damned if you do, damned if you don't". Do not allow yourself to be forced into making a choice between two alternatives. Why should you have a preference. You might say, "I'm not sure that I have a preference as such. In my present job I enjoy working closely with a team, but in my previous job I was quite autonomous and I thoroughly enjoyed the responsibility".*

**25. If you could choose any job what would it be?**

*A strange question you might think, but quite common. It is an effective way of establishing what career ambitions have not been realised and is based on the assumption that no one is doing what they really want to do, that we are all in some way compromising. Let your competitors bemoan the fact that they really wanted to be a footballer or a ballerina, the questioner will then be interested to find out what stopped them achieving this. There is a two word answer that will impress "this job". Any other answer implies that the job you are discussing is second best.*

**26. What are your long term career aims?**

**27. What was the main weakness of your last boss?**

**28. Has your career developed as you would have liked?**

**29. Would you be prepared to relocate?**

**30. Have you ever failed in any job you have tried to do?**

**31. How would you describe your relationship with your subordinates?**

**32. How do you motivate them?**

**33. Would you accept this job if I offered it to you?**

**34. How important is money to you?**

**35. Why haven't you found a job yet?**

*The longer you are in the job market, the less desirable you become. This on its own is an excellent reason for managing an intensive job search campaign. Don't let them get away with this question or you've lost control of the interview. Say something like "Well, I am being selective about my choice of jobs. I could have accepted others but, unlike this one, I did not see them as being good career moves". If you have declined other offers all well and good. If you haven't then think carefully before indicating as such.*

**36. Why did you not pursue A'Levels/Highers/a Degree?**

**37. You are lacking in specific experience for this job**

**38. What can you offer us ?**

**39. Do you have a pension?**

**40. What is your present salary?**

*Here we come to the issue of timing. If this question is asked early you may wish not to discuss salary at all. You may wish to respond "I would prefer to talk in terms of the overall package as I find that basic salaries can be misleading, but would you mind if you came back to it later?".*

**41. What salary are you seeking?**

*This is a marginally better way for the issue to be raised. You may wish to respond "I would prefer to talk in terms of overall packages as I find that basic salaries can be misleading. At the moment I am keeping a fairly open mind, for the right job remuneration may not be a deciding factor, however, I am seeking to maximise my earning potential and improve my present position". They may raise the issue of the going rate for the job. This is irrelevant. At the end of the day they want the job done well by you, or they want it done cheaply.*

**42. Why did they make you redundant?**

*Do not acquiesce meekly. Answer along the lines of "over the past few years a number of jobs went. We thought we were over the worst but then a further dozen jobs were lost and mine was one of them. However, I do see this as a good opportunity to move my career along and use my skills within an organisation such as yours".*

**43. Do you ever have doubts about your ability to do a job?**

**44. What do you do in your spare time?**

**45. You don't have any marketing experience, do you?**

*Like age, if this really were a problem you wouldn't be there. Reply "I relish the challenge of taking on marketing. I can satisfy most of your needs and I want to broaden my experience. Marketing interests me because I am adaptable and learn quickly, and I really don't foresee a problem."*

- 46. What leadership qualities do you possess ?
- 47. Who did your CV for you?
- 48. If the interests of your boss and your staff conflict, with whom would you tend to side?
- 49. Are you sure that this job is good enough for you?
- 50. Do you regard it as a weakness to blow your top?

### QUESTIONS TO ASK AT AN INTERVIEW

- 1. How do you see the company developing over the next five years?
- 2. How has this vacancy arisen?
- 3. Before leaving today would it be convenient for me to have a look around?
- 4. If I were to join the company, where might you see me in five years time?
- 5. What would you see as my priorities in this job?
- 6. On what criteria will you judge my success in this job?
- 7. To whom will I be directly accountable?
- 8. When will I hear from you?
- 9. I have enjoyed our discussion and am confident that I can do the job, do you have any reservations at all about my suitability?
- 10. Any questions about an aspect of their operation in which you will not be directly involved.

Know when to keep quiet. If you feel you have dealt with a particular point effectively, do not continue talking even if the interviewer has paused. A five second pause may feel like five minutes, but don't be afraid of the silence. The pause is used by professional interviewers to get people to say imprudent things. Amateurs will do it because they do not know what they are going to say. Either way you win, by not saying anything imprudent, or gaining control of the interview.

Remember throughout the interview you must sell yourself. Tell the interviewer what you've done and what you can do. Make the interviewer want to employ you.

### Close

At some point you will have to make the sale. In every meeting there is an optimum time in which some kind of decision is made, whether after 5 minutes or 2 hours. Watch out for the closing signals. If the interviewer starts shuffling papers together and looks anxiously at their watch then a decision has been made and he/she wants to get away. Let him/her.

These signals and your own judgement on how well you are performing will determine the number and type of questions you will want to ask in this closing part of the interview (see 'Questions to Ask at Interview'). You can now probably enter the stage of the interview where you start asking questions. A no lose question is "I have enjoyed our discussion and am confident that I can do the job, do you have any reservations about my suitability?". Your competitors won't ask this one, they will want to get out without hearing any bad news. You should not be afraid to let the interviewer voice their objections to the sale". If the interviewer can think of any reasons why you might not get the job, then you must tell him/her why it is not a problem.

After the interview it is often a good idea to write to thank the interviewer for his/her time. Say you enjoyed your visit and talk, would be more than willing to go through a second interview (if there will be any), and even more interested in working with the company than before.