

How To Answer Basic Interview Questions and Answers

Part 1

Traditional interview questions are questions that focus on your skills and value. This kind of questions are usually very descriptive. It gives the interviewer an idea of who you are, and how you fit into the role and company at large.

1. “Tell me about yourself”?

This is one question that you are sure that you will likely be asked regardless of the position that you are applying for. This question can take different forms like; can I meet you? Who are you? Can we know you? You don't need to be confused they all mean the same thing. As simple as the question looks, it could also be very tricky. Be careful not to give unnecessary personal details about yourself. All the recruiter wants to know is who you are and how you fit into the role and the company's vision and work environment. Be careful to frame your response around what makes you the best fit for the role. You might be tempted to talk about all the good stuff, but you will need to keep it concise and relevant.

These statements will guide your response to the question;

- Talk about who you are professionally
- Highlight your competencies
- Talk about why you are here

Sample Answer

“I am an innovative customer service manager with 6 years of experience managing and monitoring all the aspect of the customer service function-from solving customer's problems to ensuring customer retention to increasing sales. (**Who you are**)

I have spent 6 years developing my skills as a customer service manager. I have been able to attract recognition and several awards even national awards 3 times. I love solving customer problems and overseeing my team members do so too. (**Competence highlights**)

Even if I love my current position, I know that I am ready to take up a more challenging role in customer service, and that is why I am very excited about this position. (**Why you are here**)”

You can see that the answer responded to the three statements that we made earlier. You can use the statements to frame your own answer too.

Never give this kind of answer;

“My name is Daniel Peters, I am from Delta state, and I attended St. Johns primary school after which I went to Methodist Boys School. After my secondary education, I gained admission into the University of Lagos. I am from a family of 6, my parents are very poor, and so I need this job so that I can take care of my siblings ...”.

2. **What are your strengths?**

This question could be really confusing and hard to crack most times because you are asked to talk about your strong points. It is quite normal for you to feel awkward talking about your strengths without bragging.

Well, to answer this question effectively, you will have to follow some of this formula;

Assess your hard skills

Assess your transferable skills

Assess your personal traits

When you are assessing these skills, make sure they are closely related and relevant to the position that you are applying for. When you are answering this question, try and stay away from personal qualities and concentrate more on professional traits.

As simple as the question looks, it is also very possible for you to mess the whole interview up especially if you have not taken out the time to discover yourself to know your strengths, and how to properly communicate them to the recruiter.

You should also be able to accurately choose strengths that will help you perform the task well if you are offered the job. It means that you should not have a one fits all answer to this question.

When answering this question, remember that the recruiter is looking for a good fit, and at the same time trying to form a picture of you based on your response, and make sure your strengths are real strengths that will add value to the company. See sample answer to help frame your answer;

Sample Answer

If you are applying for the position of a customer service manager, this is what your response will look like:

“My strength is my patience to solving problems (**Assess your hard skills**).

My current position as a customer service manager, I was patient (**Personal trait**) enough to turn a toxic work environment to a positive one, and created a motivating environment where everyone can work comfortably.

I also feel that my communication skills (**transferable skills**) are top-level because I relate with senior executives on the same basis that I relate with junior staff members.”

This answers the question well to a large extent because the answer highlights the strengths that are relevant to that particular position. The candidate did not give a well-rehearsed answer but also gave a real-life instance that makes it more detailed.

3. Can tell us about your weaknesses?

This may sound like the trickiest question that a recruiter can ever ask. It may feel really awkward for you to talk about your weakness during a job interview when you are supposed to be pitching yourself.

The confusing part of the whole question is how to actually talk about your weakness, but not making it a big threat to the role that you are applying for.

When recruiters' ask this question, they are not very much concerned about the answer, but they are more concerned about how you answer the question. Many candidates tend to lie about their weaknesses, it is not advisable for you to lie about your weakness even if you should put it in a subtle manner.

When you are answering questions about your weakness, you should be careful not to give cliché answers that are not close to being your weakness at all.

Answers like **"my greatest weakness is that I am so much of a perfectionist, I love everything to be organized and orderly at all the time."**

This answer looks perfect, but this is a common cliché that sounds really unrealistic and doesn't reflect a true weakness at all. This statement will guide you to answer this question well:

Be self-aware: To answer this question well, you have to be self-aware to recognize your real weakness. Be careful when choosing a weakness so that it does not affect you getting the job.

Be truthful: As much as you want to give a piece of information that will not affect the job, you should also be sure that you are talking about a real weakness.

Self-improvement/recovery: After telling the recruiter about your weakness, you should also state the effort that you are putting in to manage the weakness that you stated.

Sample Answers

Sample 1

"I am really impatient working in a team (self-awareness)-I love to work independently and so it is difficult for me to rely on others to complete a task. That is why I have pursued a position that makes it possible for me to work independently (be truthful). However, I have also worked to improve this weakness by enrolling in team building workshops. While I work independently, it is important I learn how to trust my co-workers better." (Self-improvement/recovery).

Sample 2

"Public speaking makes me really nervous (self-awareness). Even if I don't have to do too much of public in my role as a graphic designer, I nonetheless feel it is an important skill I have to get used when communicating with others. (Truthful)
To overcome the fright, I spoke to my manager that I would love to give the introductory speech during our team meetings.

4. Why are you leaving your current job?

This is one question that can throw a job-seeker off the balance if the person is not very prepared for the question. Many times, job-seekers sincerely leave their current jobs because they want to get a better offer, but that is not what you will want to tell your prospective employer.

This question could be really tricky because you don't want to say that you are leaving your current job because you want a better offer and sound like a **"gold digger"** that will still leave in search for a better offer somewhere else.

To tackle this question, you would need to give an answer that is closely related to you wanting to move forward in your career. No one would frown at anyone's attempt to wanting to move forward in their career. You have to be careful not to emit **"negative vibes"** when answering the question.

You can take a look at these sample reasons that are easy to explain;

- Desire to improve work/life balance.
- Your wish to learn
- Your yearn to take on more responsibility
- Your wish to take on less responsibility
- Wanting to relocate
- Desire for a career change.

Answering this question, you should not just throw the answer at the recruiter, you should take time to and make sure you are giving the right answer to the question. You can use this opportunity to talk about your interest in the new position that you are applying for and not talk despairingly about your current employer.

Don't be negative about your current employer, rather you should focus on what the new position will afford you (career wise). If you speak poorly of your boss during an interview, what proof does the potential employer have that you wouldn't say the same thing about them in another environment? \

Always avoid answers that relate to compensation, company finance or poor management. You should always stay positive regardless.

Sample Answers

"I have acquired great experience in my current job, but due to the size of the organization growth is limited. So for me to continue to grow, I need to go somewhere else, and working in this company will avail me the opportunity to grow in my career."
Remember to be positive and frame your answers around the organization you wish to work for.

"I have really learned a lot working with an amazing group of people in my current employment, but this opportunity fits very well with the direction I want to take in my career path."

5. Why should we hire you?

Most times when recruiters ask this question, job-seekers are mostly thrown out of balance. Most times it is like putting the job-seeker in the position of the recruiter. This question will make many job-seekers ask themselves this question; “If I were the employer, why would I hire myself?”

Often times when recruiters ask “why should we hire you?” they indirectly want to know why you are the best fit for the job.

You should always avoid answers like:

“You should hire me because I know you urgently need someone to fill this position, and I think I can do the job”

It is very important for you to take your time to think of a concise and effective answer to this question. Before you attempt to answer the question, you should know;

- a. Why recruiters ask **why should we hire you?**
- b. how to answer the question
- c. The response to give

Why recruiters ask “why should we hire you?”

Job-seekers may feel that recruiters ask this question just to make them feel uncomfortable, but that is not the case. Recruiters ask this question because they want to know why you are the best fit for the job.

Sample Answers

If you are applying for the role of a web developer;

“I believe that my experience in technology, specifically in web design makes me the best person for this position. In my previous job, I was responsible for updating the company’s website. This required me to always make sure everything goes on well on the web page, update employee profile and ensure proper content upload on the site. I enjoyed the role, which was what attracted me to this company, I would love to bring in my skills to this position”.

How to answer the question if you are a fresh graduate with no work experience:

Getting your first job after graduation may not be as hard as you may think. It is true that employers are about getting the right talent to fill their positions, but being a fresh graduate is not a disadvantage if you prepare well for the interview.

“I am a very driven and open-minded person that can really learn fast. During my volunteer with a local retail outlet, I discovered how much I enjoyed solving customers’ problems and rendering service in general. Looking at the job description and what I have learned from the interview, I think this position will support my interest and will also give me the opportunity to contribute positively to the organization, and am very excited about this opportunity”.

6. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

This is one question that employers use to trap you in a corner and you may not even recognize it at all. Employers don't just ask this question because they are really interested in what you want to do with your life in 5 years' time. Employers ask this question for two reasons:

- a. **The employer wants to know how long you plan to stay in the position.**
- b. The employer wants to know if your vision aligns with that of the company.

As much as the employer want know your plan in the position and the company, it could be tempting for you to pour out your sincere intentions, but saying it out like that may not be the best approach to the question.

- a. **Plans about how you would love to take the position of the hiring manager in 5 years.**
- b. Strategies about how you would be promoted in a few years.
- c. Your aspiration about owning your own business in a few years
- d. **A straight "I don't know", "I don't have any plans for the future, I just want a job now"**

I know you would be anxious to ask **"then what does the recruiter want to hear?"** You should never forget that the business of a recruiter is that he wants to get the right candidate that would stay and grow in the position.

Sample Answers

This is how your answer should look like:

"In 5 years, I would love to complete my internal and external training program for my position. I have read about it on your website, and I think it is an amazing opportunity for me to learn. I don't only look forward to getting the right training for my role, but it will quicken my journey to becoming a marketing manager which my career goal. My ideal track would be creating awareness in rural areas. I learned that getting your product to rural places is of great value to you."

Answering the question like this expresses two things to the employer:

- a. With this answer, you have given the hiring manager the impression that you are satisfied with the position, and also enthusiastic about developing in the position.
- b. This answer also shows that your personal career goals align with the company's vision

More responses

"I am propelled to be the best at what I do, and I want to work in an organization that will give me the opportunity to develop my skills, handle interesting projects, and be part of a team that I can really learn from. A good number of creative thinkers in the industry work here, and that is a big reason why I would love to build a career here".

"My current goal is to fit into a position at a company where I can grow and take on new challenges and responsibilities over time. Moving forward, I would love to assume management responsibility and get involved in pushing the brand. Ultimately, I would love to be a part of an organization where I can build a career".

7. Why are you leaving your current job?

This question could be a really tempting question especially if you are applying for a new position. This question could tempt you to talk about any negative experience that was associated with your past role.

As tempted as you may be to expel negativity, you still have to be very careful not to go on about how terrible you felt in your previous position, you should rather concentrate on things that make this position the best fit for you.

Whether you were asked to leave or you willingly resigned, it is important for you to frame your answer in such a way that it casts you in a positive light. Be careful and make sure you avoid “**bad mouthing**” your previous employer.

You should never make statements like; “My boss is an oppressor; he loves to set unrealistic targets and unnecessary work achievement that sets employees against one another”. Even if your boss is not a model, it is not useful to talk about that in an interview. Imagine that the recruiter is a friend to your previous boss, what do you think would happen after the interview?

Giving a negative answer doesn't tell well of you to the recruiter, so you need to be neutral and leave your boss out of the conversation.

You should rather focus on the reasons why you want to take up the new role. For example; “My current job puts a lot of focus on collaborative achievement, but I look forward to working in an environment that encourages personal growth and development. I would love to be able to measure my career growth and be open to dealing with bigger challenges”. This is a better response.

This is how your response should look like if you were fired:

If losing the job was not directly your fault and not as a result of poor performance, then you can frame your answers like this:

“Our biggest clients were leaving the market, and so my company was forced to dissolve some positions and unfortunately my position happened to be one of the newest positions that were created in the department at that time, and it was dissolved. I am extremely happy about my stay in my previous employment because I did learn a lot that will help me propel my career to the next level”

If you were fired due to low performance, then your answer can look like this:

“The management of my previous organization experienced a reformation, and I was assigned a new line manager. Working with the new manager, after a while it became obvious to me that my new manager had expectations that did not match up with my strength.

After a while, my manager recommended that he brings in someone he had worked with that had a better experience both local and international, and I was replaced.

I learned that my strongest strengths were in customer service rather than project management. I know that my skills in customer service will be of great asset to a role like this that focuses on improving customer experience”.

8. Have you ever been forced to resign?

During an interview, it is quite normal for the recruiter to bring up discussions about your previous employment.

One question that the recruiter may likely ask you is if you have ever been forced to resign. The interviewer will likely use your response to the question to know the kind of issue that may likely arise if the company hires you.

The recruiter may also judge your ability to learn from the situation and how much you are able to sincerely account for your actions from your response to the question.

When answering this question, you need to be very careful, **these are the mistakes you should avoid:**

Don't lie about the situation that led to the resignation in your previous employment.

Do your best to avoid being negative about your experience and try not to bad mouth your previous employer.

Avoid pushing all the blame of the incident to the organization or the employer. You should try your best to show how some of your actions contributed to the situation.

Avoid putting yourself in the state of pity that would make everyone else involved wrong. It gives the recruiter the idea that you would repeat the same action again.

This is what you should rather focus on:

Tell the recruiter about what you have learned from the situation, and how the experience has molded you into a better person.

Show that you have made an effort to address the action that contributed to you being fired.

Always let the interviewer know that you have eliminated any action that may make you face the same situation with a new employer.

Sample Answer

This is an example of an answer that will properly deal with this question:

"I was forced to resign because marketing wasn't a strong fit for me. My employer was extremely pleased with my customer service and support skills, but over a long period of time, I wasn't meeting up with my monthly sales goals. I have decided to shift my focus on customer service and support. This position offers me a better opportunity to leverage on my communication skills".

This question may appear to be one question that you want to avoid. Focusing on the positive angle when answering this question will give you the opportunity to explain that you are the right person for the position.

9. What do you like least about your job?

This question can seem like a net to trap you because the recruiter looks forward to getting a negative response from you, and if you are not careful, you may likely prevent yourself from getting the job.

When you are asked this question, try to be honest with your answers and also maintain a positive tone. This is what you should emphasize when you are about to answer this question:

Don't mention something you dislike that is common with the position that you are applying for.

Avoid talking about personal issues you have with co-workers in the office.

Avoid answers that will make you appear as an incorrigible person.

Avoid giving the interviewer the impression that you are difficult to please.

Don't use this question as an opportunity for you to start bad mouthing your previous boss or company.

You should rather look forward to creating an impression that will make the recruiter not scared about you taking up the new position. You can start off your answer by using this approach:

Mention what you like about your previous job

Touch on what you did not like and focus on things you did not like about the task or a particular situation.

You can talk about how you were able to manage the situation until you decide to move on in your career.

Sample answers

"I really liked my previous employer and the talented people in my team. One of the challenges that I faced was working remotely from my location, and it became more challenging for me as the company grew bigger. I was also tired of limiting myself to working alone. Why I am enthusiastic about this job is that it will give me the opportunity to work remotely when the need arises. I look forward to connecting with team members physically and not online"

"I really cannot say I dislike anything about my current job. My company is a start-up that is still in its infancy stage which gives a limited room for advancement. I think I have gotten to the peak of my career in my current organization, and I would like to learn more about technology because the world is becoming technologically based. Regrettably, we don't work with technology, in order to advance my career, I've decided it is time to move on"

"It is a really great company overall, but my position kept me behind the scenes always in the computer room, with very little interaction with co-workers and customers. I love solving computer or gadget related problems, but I value human relation a lot too, this is why I am really enthusiastic about this job"

When you are answering this question, be careful not to go on negative about your current job and employer. You should rather use the question as an opportunity to tell the interviewer how the job matches your skills and personality.

10. How would your last boss describe you?

When employers ask this question, they simply want to know what your strengths and weaknesses are. The answer you give will help the interviewer understand why your current employer sees you as a great asset to the team.

These are the points you should focus on when answering the question:

Relate your answers to why you think you are a good fit for the position
You can point out two to three points about how your boss sees your performance
Don't forget to state how you enjoyed working with your boss
You can tell a story about your recommendation with your boss

You should also avoid making mistakes like:

Bad mouthing your boss to bring out your good traits
Don't spin out negative thought that your boss had about you, even if there are some negative feelings you should also see the positive light of it.

Avoid bragging about how well you and your boss went along

Sample answers

"My last boss would say that I am always proactive and prepared to solve any form of challenge. Nothing really takes me unawares, I am usually prepared to face future challenges. I think that my ability to see a problem beforehand and solve them while they are still at the formative stage is what sets me apart from other employees".

"My last boss would see me as a problem solver and when I newly started my past position, I was always ready to face challenges and solve problems with ease. I think that my ability to be calm when there is a difficult situation is what really distinguished me from other employees"

"I think my boss would talk about my two most obvious traits which is hard working and result oriented. My boss has always known me as someone that loves things to be done the right way and at the right time. So I was always putting in more hours to make sure that we achieve the desired result in any project. My boss always commended me for that. I also work hard to keep myself up-to-date on current industry trends and technologies by attending meet-ups and workshop to better position myself to face up to any challenge that may arise in the cause of performing my job"