

36 TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

And ways to structure the responses

(Management specific questions start with question 30)

1. Tell me about yourself

Frame it: Describe how you are today vs. a long story re-capping your resume. E.g. "I maximize an organization's productivity."

2. (If unemployed): What have you been doing since your last position?

Frame it: Show them that you are interviewing them as well. E.g., "I have been very discerning about the position and company that I wish to work for."

3. Why did you leave your last position?

Frame it: Tell the truth but keep it positive. Say something like: "To obtain a position which would fully utilize my talents and strengths." Or, "We saw things differently and agreed to mutually part ways."

4. What would your previous boss say about your performance?

Frame it: Accentuate your success and strengths. E.g. "My previous boss will substantiate my success in _____. He will mention my strengths in _____".

5. What did you wish that you accomplished in your previous job that you were unable to do?

Frame it: Focus on growth or productivity aspirations on your part. E.g. "I was unable to negotiate more funding for my budget. There was a narrow investment focus and extreme market volatility resulting in several setbacks."

6. What is your greatest fear?

Frame it: There is really only one wrong answer here that sends up a red flag: The fear of failure.

7. What are your regrets?

Frame it: Regrets mean that you don't have closure on your past. A more positive answer is: "I don't have any regrets because I see each setback or mistake as a learning experience. I rarely make the same mistake twice."

8. What is your next career move?

Frame it: Be careful here... don't parrot back the position being discussed. E.g., "I want to be at the helm of a _____ group and be one of those people accountable for financial success and growth."

9. What are your strengths?

Frame it: Opportunity for you to connect your qualifications to what is required for the position being filled. Mention relevant personal talents as well as work content skills. Have some achievement stories in reserve in case the interviewer wants some examples.

10. What are your weaknesses?

Frame it: Focus on a relevant "preferred" quality (*very low* on the list in the job description and candidate profile). Concentrate on your relevant transferable skill and natural talents. *Stay away from* "I am too intense" or "I work too hard." Or "I have excessive expectations of my people."

11. How do you recognize incompetence? Excellence?

Frame it: Discuss the standards that you have set and how you have dealt with players above and below the line.

12. Define your success in problem solving.

Frame it: Story time. Outline a specific challenge and how you solved it. Then summarize the talents that you utilize.

13. Tell me about your negotiation skills.

Frame it: Story time. Discuss a specific negotiation accomplishment. Mention how you read the situation and cues.

14. What is the number 1 achievement of your career?

Frame it: Pick the one that you were the most proud of. Be sure that you were the lead as primarily accountable (revenue or increasing productivity). Make it relative to what the company is looking for. And by the way, only give one!!

15. What are the top 5 contributions you have made during your career?

Frame it: See # 16 and make each of them relevant to the position you are a candidate for. With a list of 5 contributions being asked for, this is not a time to tell stories. Give the bottom line result.

16. When did you fail? (And how did you remedy the situation?)

Frame it: Pick a situation that did not meet expectations for very good reasons. And describe how you fixed it. Add that failure is not learning from an experience.

17. How can you make a contribution to this company?

Frame it: this is where your research pays off. Talk from a revenue increasing productivity enhancement standpoint.

18. How are you unique?

Frame it: This can be answered along the lines of “tell me about yourself.” Talk about your natural talents and what you intrinsically value.

19. Why are you interested in our company?

Frame it: Tell them about why you selected this company to interview. Mention the products, services, markets, the reputation etc. Companies like to be “chosen” and “selected” as much as you like to be chosen.

20. Why should we hire you for this position?

Frame it: *BINGO!!* This is an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of your talents and skills to the job that you are interviewing for.

21. What are your compensation requirements?

Frame it: Always fend off this question until you have completed all of the interviewing rounds. Say, “When we have completely discussed the position and finished the screening, I will better be able to answer that question.” Or, “I am sure if we have a match, negotiation of compensation will be relatively easy.” Or “I’m sure that you will make the very best offer that is fair to you and to me when the time comes.” It’s OK to tell a recruiter the details of your compensation.

22. Have you worked under pressure? Explain.

Frame it: Have a story that describes the circumstances that dramatically underscores this. Be sure it’s a successful one.

23. What did you like / dislike about your previous job?

Frame it: On the positive side, pick those aspects that will be the most relevant to the job and company you are interviewing. On the downside, something like: “I wish I could have used more of my skills and talents.” Do not trash anyone or thing—even if they really “done you wrong.”

24. How long before you could make a contribution to our company?

Frame it: *BINGO!!* Again. This will give you the opportunity to ask some questions about the challenges facing the company, the group and the position. Once you are armed with the facts, you can then share your “plan” to execute your solutions.

25. Have you ever been asked to resign? What happened?

Frame it: Be truthful here. Say things like: “We agreed to disagree” or “We were both disappointed that there was not a better outcome. The decision was made in the best interests of the company that I resign.”

26. What was the most difficult decision you had to face?

Frame it: This is an opportunity to set up a complex problem and/or a decision that was highly time-sensitive where getting additional facts was no an option. Of course you made the right one!

27. What are your pet peeves?

Frame it: Say something like: “I manage my peeves pretty well. That being said, I have a pet peeve around people who don’t make their commitments stick.”

28. What was the best job you ever had and why?

Frame it: Select the job where you the most happy and productive. Your talents and strengths were fully utilized. You looked forward to going to work every day. Mention the people, the products and the company — and the results.

29. Did you and your former (or current) boss ever disagree? Explain.

Frame it: Say something like: “Yes we did. We did not make it personal. We always had respect for each other’s opinion. We did more dialogue about our differences than digging in taking a firm stance — and we both learned a lot.”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS:

30. How would your subordinates describe you?

Frame it: Focus on your strengths as a leader and manager and coach. (E.g. "I believe that a vast majority of individuals who have worked for me will tell you that I am honest, fair and above board. They will also tell you that I am a good listener.")

31. Describe your management style.

Frame it: Discuss your leadership style as well. Focus on the concepts of creating and building teams that contributed to growth and revenue as well as being the key decision maker with the accountability. Discuss how you have increased productivity.

32. Have you fired an employee for poor performance? What happened?

Frame it: Choose one without naming names. This response should demonstrate your ability to pull the trigger in a timely way that helps the group and the employee in question.

33. What do you like the best about managing people?

Frame it: Answer the question. "Growing them and having them be more productive. I like to both coach and manage." Be sure you have examples.

34. What do you dislike the most about managing people?

Frame it: Be truthful here. Something like: "When paperwork gets in the way of productivity."

35. Are you more of a leader or more of a manager?

Frame it: Choose one or the other. Managers develop and leaders influence. The red flag answer is "I do both well."

36. Are you better at managing up or managing down?

Frame it: Basically, if you can't manage up you won't get the chance to be successful managing down. Mention 360 reviews you have received.