

Book Acing the Interview

How to Ask and Answer the Questions That Will Get You the Job!

Tony Beshara
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Recommendation

You got fired. How do you handle that during a job interview? Or you only spent a year at each of your last two jobs. How do you convince a prospective employer that you will last? You work for a firm with a great reputation, but you’re not happy. What do you say when an interviewer asks why you want to leave such a respected outfit? Job placement and recruitment expert Tony Beshara provides the best answers to these and other job interview questions. Plus, he explains the questions you should ask before you accept a job offer. TV psychologist Dr. Phil McGraw calls Beshara “the number one career placement guy” in the U.S. If you’re job hunting, he’s the right source for valuable job interview insights and information. Here, he lists more than 450 typical job interview questions and suggested answers. *BooksInShort* recommends his savvy, comprehensive and helpful book. Job seekers and interviewers alike will appreciate it.

Take-Aways

- Looking for a job is hugely stressful.
- To get hired, you must become proficient at the job interview process. This takes practice, so attend as many job interviews as possible.
- Using a prepared script, phone companies to ask for interviews.
- Anticipate the questions you will be asked at an interview, and prepare credible, compelling responses.
- Employers want people who can do the work, don’t want too much pay and aren't risky.
- Your likeability is more important than your job qualifications.
- Ask the interviewer questions that elicit information you really need about the job.
- Imagine yourself in the interviewer’s chair to gain a clear perspective on what attributes they seek.
- Don’t think that a job interview is a conversation between equals. First, you have to prove yourself.
- Don’t shoot yourself in the foot at the end of the interview by asking the interviewer if they would like to know more about you.

Summary

Out of Work?

Looking for work is not easy. In fact, when it comes to life’s primary stressors, finding a job is right up there with divorce and the loss of a loved one.

In uncertain economic times, being out of work can be a devastating emotional experience. Thus, job hunters must quickly master the interview process. Otherwise, their stints on the unemployment line will be longer than necessary.

“No matter how often a person looks for a job, it is still emotionally stressful.”

Job hunting is never fun. However, it becomes downright painful if you have only a few potential employers from whom to seek interviews. The more interviews you arrange, the better your chances are of finding a good job. Dig deep to find out about new opportunities. Talk to every possible source of information, including previous employers, former colleagues, friends, acquaintances, professional and trade associations, job placement organizations and people who assist local businesses.

“Getting a job is a numbers game. Numbers of interviews are crucial to getting good offers.”

Use the Internet to get the names and contact data of prospective employers and their representatives, but never send your résumé unannounced. Call first. Always make the phone your primary tool for contacting potential employers. Prepare a script that quickly showcases your most important work assets, expertise, achievements and capabilities. Discuss these attributes in terms of the benefits they offer prospective employers.

“Answering questions in today’s interviewing environment is much harder than most people realize.”

Use your script to arrange an interview when you reach a potential interviewer on the phone. First greet the person by name and introduce yourself. Outline your

experience and qualifications. Assert the ways in which you can become a valuable contribution to the firm. Close the conversation by suggesting a time and place where you can meet to discuss a possible position at the firm. If you contact enough companies and make enough calls, eventually you will line up the interviews you need.

“Getting a job offer is one challenge, but finding out about the company and people you are going to work for is just as important.”

Once you get an appointment, prepare fully. At the interview, try to adapt to the psychology and point of view of the interviewer. To understand interviewers, as well as other people in business, be aware of four different kinds of personalities:

- “Analytical” thinkers are bottom-line oriented individuals who enjoy working with hard facts and figures.
- “Driver” types are blunt, direct can-do personalities.
- “Amiable” people are easygoing but careful in decision making.
- “Expressive” individuals are risk takers who rely on hunches.

“The better you sell yourself in the interviewing process, the more a company likes you and wants to hire you, the more leverage you have in negotiation.”

Identify your personality type, but be prepared to adjust it to the personality of the individual who interviews you. Anticipate the usual questions prospective employers will ask and plan ideal responses.

Questions Employers Use to Qualify You

During an interview, employers want to address four concerns:

1. Can you handle the work?
2. Are you likeable?
3. Do you pose any risk?
4. Can they reach a salary agreement with you?

“Candidates don’t recognize the risks that they present to a prospective employer. In fact, many things that you think are a positive might very well be a big liability.”

Here are some typical questions and prompts, with suggestions for your best responses:

- **“Tell me about yourself and your last few jobs.”** – This is not a request to hear your entire life story. Stick to your career and professional accomplishments.
- **“What was the most difficult part of your last two jobs?”** – This question provides a terrific opportunity for you to convey that you gladly accept challenges. Explain what made your last two jobs tough, but follow up by explaining how you overcame those difficulties. Discuss your job challenges in a positive, upbeat way. Use anecdotes to reinforce your narrative.
- **“What is your management style?”** – This is a tricky question. If you label yourself as a compassionate leader or a “take no prisoners” manager, you may hurt your chances with an interviewer who may want to hire the opposite type of person. Instead, explain that your management style depends on the circumstances. Stress that you have always been able to get your direct reports to work hard, and to meet or surpass their objectives.
- **“What do people like most about you? What do they like least?”** – In terms of likeability, your interviewer wants to hear that people like working with you. Say that you know how to communicate, how to handle yourself during emergencies, and that you never quit. Treat the latter question lightly: “I can’t cook” or “I am terrible at golf.”
- **“How do you deal with people...you don’t like and who don’t like you in the workplace?”** – Your reaction to this question matters more than your answer. Treat the question as if it does not apply to you. State that you always try to stay on an even keel with all your colleagues. Explain that co-workers should treat each other with respect and that is what you always do.
- **“Why did you leave your last position?”** – Your response to this question will make or break your case. Answer it most carefully. Understand that “employers identify with employers.” Do not indicate that you want to leave, or did leave, your firm because management does not, or did not, like you. State that you want to grow professionally and can do so more effectively in a different environment. If you were laid off, be honest about it. Stress that you liked where you worked, but the company had unavoidable cutbacks that included you. You want to convey one main idea: You really like, or liked, your job. Whatever you do, don’t say you need a larger salary, that is the kiss of death.
- **“You...stayed short periods of time in your last three jobs. What’s wrong?”** – This is a tough question. Try to paint as positive a picture as you can. For example, you might say, “I made some poor career choices in the past. But I have learned from them. After a few false starts, I now know exactly what I want. Your job will be perfect for me. If you hire me, I hope to work for your organization for a long time to come.”
- **“Why did you leave your last job so abruptly? Or, why do you want to leave your current job?”** – This is a killer question. Search for the most “antiseptic” response. One plausible answer is that you were stymied in your career and wanted a position with more responsibility. Do not criticize your current or past employer in any way. That is a surefire way to guarantee that you won’t get a job with anyone else.
- **“Where do you see yourself five years from now? Or, how does this job fit into your career goals?”** – Again, how you answer this question is as important as what you say. If you admit that you do not have a five-year goal, you will sink your chances. But if you answer that you want to be CEO, you will seem like a fool. One plausible response: “It’s hard to predict what will happen in five years. But I will feel a sense of accomplishment if I am making an important contribution at work.”
- **“Were you fired? And, why?”** – Employers understand layoffs, so, if you can, try to present your dismissal as a layoff. Most previous employers will go along with that. Tell the interviewer you liked your job. Stay away from any emotion during your discussion. If it is impossible to avoid the fact that you were fired, be direct. Tell the interviewer that despite your firing, you still like your old firm. Try to shift the discussion to previous jobs where you did well and to the good references that you have from those companies.
- **“What are you currently earning? Or, what have you been earning most recently?”** – Answer precisely. Don’t make it appear that you earn more than you do. That would be a terrible mistake. Sometimes, a new employer will contact your old one to see what they paid you. If your new boss learns that you lied,

he or she can terminate you on the spot.

- **“What kind of money would you like to earn?”** – Handle this common question by saying, “I want to earn a salary that is commensurate with the contributions I can make. I am confident I can make a substantial contribution at your firm. What does your firm plan to pay for this position?”

Questions You Should Ask

Before you ask prospective employers about their companies and job openings, ask yourself some basic questions. What are your primary work assets and skills? What is your ideal job or company? Why? You cannot present yourself strongly if you do not know your own objectives. Learn everything you can about the firms to which you apply for work. Being uninformed about a potential employer will reflect poorly on you in an interview.

“Don’t negotiate over the phone or by e-mail unless you absolutely have to. Face to face is always best.”

People who get ahead know how to ask great questions that elicit information they really need and want. Ask your interviewer these questions:

- **“How long have you been here?”** – People like to talk about themselves. This question provides a good opportunity to get the interviewer to open up about the firm.
- **“Are there any internal candidates?”** – This is important information. Sometimes, managers plan to hire someone from within their organizations, but they talk to a few external candidates to make their job search activities appear more legitimate.
- **“Why are there no internal candidates for this job?”** – No internal candidates may mean that you are walking into a minefield. Maybe no one in the firm wants this particular job. If that’s the case, it’s better to find out before you commit to the role.
- **“What is the most difficult part of the job?”** – The answer the interviewer provides will enable you to adjust your presentation to focus on the strengths you can bring to this challenging aspect of the job.
- **“What is the next person (or groups of persons) I will be interviewing with like?”** – If you are under serious job consideration, you will normally speak with more than just one person, particularly at a large corporation. Make your follow-up interview as positive an experience as possible by learning all you can about that interviewer, including his or her role in the company, personality, likes and dislikes, and so on.
- **“Based on our interview, do you have any concerns about my ability to do the job?”** – If the answer is yes, ask the interviewer to be explicit. Deal forthrightly with each concern. If the answer is no, then immediately ask if the person will recommend hiring you. If that answer also is yes, quickly assume the sale. Say, “That’s great. I will contact (the ultimate hiring authority) next week so we can work out all the various details.”
- **“Why do you want to hire me? What did I demonstrate to you that the other candidates didn’t?”** – The answers to these questions will let you know how much leverage you have (or don’t have) when it comes to negotiating salary and benefits.
- **“Why have people in the past failed to do well at this job?”** – Listen closely to the response to this question. The answer the interviewer provides may warn you against accepting the job if it is offered.

Common Interview Mistakes

If you make these mistakes, you will remain unemployed. Unsuccessful candidates:

- **Have “poor body language or didn’t look the interviewer in the eye”** – Most people can eliminate these problems in advance by practicing and role playing. Failure to do so tells employers that you were not willing to prepare.
- **“Forget this is a selling situation...and don’t ask for the job”** – If you don’t sell yourself during the interview, you will never get the job. Failure to ask is presumptuous.
- **“Think that interviewing is a ‘two-way street’”** – Don’t let the dialogue between you and the interviewer fool you into thinking that this is a standard conversation. It is not. Indeed, your conversation with the interviewer is a “one-way street.” He or she has numerous other job applicants to interview. You must prove yourself before you can engage in anything that remotely resembles a normal discussion between equals.
- **“Don’t know what they’re really selling to an employer”** – Great salespeople stress the benefits and not the features of their products. Do the same for yourself during a job interview. Explain how your attributes are valuable to the prospective employer.
- **“Don’t understand or think about what the employer is asking from the employer’s point of view”** – If you want to understand interviewers better so you know what they are looking for, try to put yourself in their position. In any discussion or negotiation, it helps to take on the other person’s point of view.
- **“Adopt an ‘I think great on my feet’ attitude”** – Never try to ad-lib through a job interview. It just doesn’t work and it makes you vulnerable to potential embarrassment.

“I do not recommend calling the HR department unless you are seeking a job in the HR department.”

Whatever you do, never end an interview with the question, “What else would you like to know about me?”

About the Author

Tony Beshara owns a placement and recruitment firm in Dallas, Texas. He has been finding jobs for people since 1973.
