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Job Interviews

E-Book

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Why Do Job Interviewers Ask Silly Questions?

Employers are looking for people who are confident, competent, hard working, dedicated, loyal, and are able to get the job done. The job interview process with its often-ridiculous questions is designed to weed out applicants who do not possess the right traits and work habits. Employers have decided that asking applicants tough, strange, weird or difficult questions can reveal who an applicant really is as a person and whether they would fit well into that organization's culture; therefore, don't be surprised if interviewers ask you strange questions, such as "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?" Other questions might be "See this pencil -- Try to sell it to me now" or "What kind of car do you drive and why did you buy that particular model?" or "If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do today?" Interviewers will also ask you difficult questions, such as "What are the reasons for your success?" or "Tell me why this company should hire you." Embarrassing questions might include "Why have you had so many jobs in such a short period of time?" or "Why have you been searching for work so long? Won't anybody hire you?" or "Why are there several big employment gaps on your resume?"

Since the average person looking for employment usually is called for 10 to 15 interviews before he gets a job offer, you would be wise to prepare for the job interview beforehand to get a job offer as quickly as possible. Like it or not, you must endure their questions if you want the job and you must be able to answer most of their questions reasonably well. The only way to do this is to practice beforehand so that you feel confident before the interview.

The Typical Job Interview

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The purpose of the typical job interview is to screen a handful of applicants who have made the final cut after a lengthy process of weeding through hundreds of resumes or job applications to select qualified candidates. If you are called for a job interview it means that the employer believes you have the basic skills and experience required for the job; however, he wants to see you in person so he can learn more about you, your personality, your appearance, your demeanor and your ability to do the job. Depending on the employer you could be competing against as little as three or as many as 30 other applicants. Don't be surprised if you are called for a second or third interview, particularly if you are applying for a position with a large company.

Most job interviews follow a standard format:

- (1) Greeting and small talk to put you at ease and break the ice. The interviewer may give you a preview of what will occur during the interview.
- (2) The employer may give you a brief overview of the position or additional information about the organization.
- (3) You respond to questions. If it's a good interview, this is the longest segment and you should do most of the talking.
- (4) You ask questions of the interviewer. Have at least five or ten questions prepared beforehand.
- (5) The interviewer closes the interview and explains the next steps in the process. Be sure to thank the interviewer for his or her time.

During the interview you should:

- ~Be enthusiastic and prepared
- ~Be knowledgeable about the organization
- ~Be confident and sell your skills
- ~Listen carefully and be interested

During the interview, the interviewer will try to determine if you have the following traits:

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| (1) Achiever | (4) Contributor | (7) Dependable |
| (2) Productive | (5) Quick Learner | (8) Stable |
| (3) Self-starter | (6) Easy Going | (9) Responsible |

The interviewer will try to determine if you possess the nine traits above by asking you a series of questions and observing your demeanor while you answer them.

The interviewer will also assess you on the following --

Personal appearance: Usually, it is a good idea to dress in proper business attire for a job interview if you would not look ridiculous showing up in a suit and tie. For example, there is no need for someone applying for a job as a sacker in a grocery store to show up in a suit. However, if the job is in an office environment, wear proper business attire even if the company has relaxed standards and allows employees to wear jeans. If the job is a blue collar type job, then be well-groomed but you are not required to wear a suit and tie -- a nice pair of slacks and a shirt or blouse would be appropriate. Your shoes should always be polished beforehand.

It is always better to be conservative in your personal appearance. Conservative means modest attire, an understated hairstyle, little make-up, short and well-manicured fingernails with no polish, and very little jewelry. Avoid using cologne or perfume as it might offend the interviewer when you walk in the room and there is a cloud of scent arriving with you.

Demeanor: Confidence is of utmost important because if you do not convey to the interviewer that you like yourself and believe in yourself then there is no reason to hire you. Stand straight and tall, look the interviewer in the eyes, and smile when you shake his or her hand. If you are offered a refreshment, such as coffee, you can accept it if you want, but it would be better if you did not (you might spill it down your front or knock it over with your briefcase). Never smoke or chew gum! Do not sit down in a chair until the interviewer has asked you to do so and when you do sit, do not slouch or try to dominate the interview. Let the interviewer conduct the interview and maintain eye contact.

Your ability to answer the question: "Why should you be hired?" No interviewer is going to ask you all of the questions discussed in this book, but all interview questions revolve around one basic question: "Why should you be hired?" In order to answer that question find out what skills you have that are pertinent to the position for which you are interviewing. Be able to identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you can illustrate them during the interview and provide the interviewer with examples of how you have applied particular skills or knowledge while performing past jobs.

Preparing for the Job Interview

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Memorizing good answers to typical interview questions isn't enough preparation. Why -- imagine three people sitting in a lobby waiting to interview for the same job. One of the applicants has spent several hours researching the company and its industry. The other two have not done any research at all. Who stands the best chance of getting the job? The person who lets the interviewer know he has done his research.

Spending three, four or even more hours to prepare for a job interview is recommended by career experts. You should become familiar with the company, its products or services, its competitors, the industry in which it operates, and decide how your skills will benefit the company so you can answer interview questions, such as "Why do you want to work for us?" "What do you know about our company?" "How can you benefit our company?" If you do this, your odds of beating out your competition increase dramatically.

Do Research Before the Interview

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The best way to start researching a company is simply to type "Name of Company" in to the search form at a major search engine, such as Google.com or, if it is a big company go right to the website: www.nameofcompany.com. Once you know more about the company and its industry, you can better match your skills and qualifications to that company's needs. Now you are ready to prepare for those tough job interview questions. Other places to do research on companies are as follows: www.wetfeet.com -- www.hooversonline.com -- thomasregister.com

If the company is small and doesn't have a website, try to learn more about the industry in which it is situated so that you can speak intelligently about current trends and problems in that industry. Although even small companies usually have a website these days, if you need to go to the public library and find out more about the company then do so.

Topics to Research

When researching a company you should know the answers to the following questions before you show up for the interview:

How old is the company? How large is the company?
What are its products or services?
Who are its customers?
Who are its major competitors?
What are its reputation / industry standing?
What are its new products or services?
What are its short- and long-term goals?
How has the company resolved problems?
Have there been recent employee layoffs?
Where is the companies' headquarters located?
What are the backgrounds of the managers?
What training programs are offered?

Post Interview Follow-up Letter

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A follow-up thank you letter to the interviewer is an important step in the interviewing process, one that candidates often forget to take. Sending such a letter is not only proper business etiquette, but it also makes you stand out from the other candidates competing for the same position. Write your thank you letter as soon as possible after the interview.

You should send a follow-up thank you letter even if you don't want the job. If this is the case, let the interviewer know in your thank you letter. Ask the interviewer to keep you in mind for any positions with the company that might be available in the future.

Components of the Follow-up Thank You Letter

Your thank you letter can be typed in a business letter format or handwritten using a pre-printed thank you note. The letter or note should express appreciation for the opportunity to interview, tour the facilities, meet other employees, etc. You might also want to write about the following:

- Mention the day of your interview and the position for which you interviewed.
- Express continued interest in the position and the company.
- Re-emphasize your most important skills and qualifications and how you expect to contribute to the organization.
- Include any information you forgot to mention in the interview, if necessary (be brief though).
- Close your letter with a comment about future contact with the employer.

Sample Thank You Letter

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"Dear _____:

I appreciated the opportunity to interview at your hospital on Monday. The tour of the facilities and conversations with Acme's laboratory staff gave me a clear overview of the role of technologists at your facility. In particular, I was impressed with the state-of-the-art equipment in Acme's laboratories and the exciting medical research that is being conducted there.

The entire experience has confirmed my desire for employment as a medical technologist with Acme Hospital. My internship as a lab assistant, along with my microbiology and chemistry course work, has prepared me well for this position. Based on my interview, I think I would fit in well with the Acme laboratory staff.

Thank you again for the experience of getting to know your organization better. I would welcome the opportunity to work for Acme Hospital, and I look forward to hearing from you in the next two weeks."

Sample Thank You Letter 2

If you decided after interviewing that you do not want the position, your note might read something like the following:

"Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the position of _____ the other day. While I still would enjoy working for your company, after learning more about the position I realize that I am searching for a more challenging position that better utilizes my skills and experience and requires less travel. If your company has such a position, please let me know."

Section 2: 100 Job Interview Questions & Answers

Subsection A. Personality, Character & Lifestyle

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A-1: Tell me about yourself.

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This is usually the first question asked because it is a good icebreaker. You should not use this open-ended question to offer useless information about your hobbies and home life. Many people will make the mistake of saying, "I'm 32 years old, married, and the mother of three children aged 5, 7 and 9. My hobbies are knitting, cycling, reading and . . . blah blah blah." This is not a good answer.

A good answer to this question is about two minutes long and focuses on work-related skills and accomplishments. Tell the interviewer why you think your work-related skills and accomplishments would be an asset to the company. You could describe your education and work history (be brief) and then mention one or two personal character traits and tell the interviewer how the traits helped you accomplish a task at school or work. Do not describe yourself with tired old clichés such as "I am a team player," "I have excellent communication skills," unless you can prove it with an illustration. For example, one might say "I would describe myself as a self-starter. At Acme Corporation, there was a problem with . . . so I created a new inventory system (give details) that reduced expenses 30 percent."

Someone with a new degree in an IT field might answer this question as follows: "I have enjoyed working with computers since I was eight years old and have always been adept at using them. Throughout junior high and high school, friends and relatives were always asking me for help with their computer problems, so no one was surprised when I chose to major in IT at college. I spent hundreds of hours at the computer learning everything I could about them and how they worked. A few years ago I became particularly interested in software development and began formulating ideas for new software that would really help consumers. I even developed plans for a few applications on my own. [Discuss the plans briefly.] I've also worked on several college teams and as an intern at Acme developing software. [Offer highlights of work experience in software development.] I would like to continue working in this particular area very much. That's why I applied for a position with your company. You're one of the leaders in software development and I want to work in a company where I can really be challenged and make a difference. I also really like the products you've developed. I think they're some of the

best on the market and I would very much enjoy working to improve and enhance these products even further and create new software as well."

A-2: Where do you see yourself in five years?

Assume that you will be promoted two or three times in five years, so your answer should state that you see yourself working at whatever job is two or three levels above the job in which you are applying. Do not claim that you will be "running the company" in five years. You might want to add that you understand your promotions will be earned through hard work and that you do not assume you will be promoted just because you stayed with the company. Good answer: "I see myself as head of the Sales Department in five years. I've already proven that I have the ability to manage a large sales staff at Acme, and I expect that I will be promoted to a senior management position in the future provided that I work very hard at my job and earn the promotions, which I expect to do."

A-3: Are you willing to relocate?

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If relocating were not an issue, the interviewer would not be asking the question. Therefore, the only acceptable answer is "Yes." If you answer in the negative, you will not get the job. If you really do not want to relocate, then perhaps you should not accept the job if it is subsequently offered to you. If you are not sure, then ask questions about relocation, such as when it is likely to occur, where you will relocate to, and would it involve a promotion.

A-4: Are you willing to travel?

If traveling were not part of the job, the interviewer would not be asking this question. Therefore, the only acceptable answer is "yes". If you are willing to travel, answer yes and give some illustrations of work travel you have done. However, if you do not want to travel, you should find out more about this aspect of the job before accepting the position, such as how much travel will be involved, where will you be traveling to and for how long.

A-5: Are you willing to work overtime?

If this wasn't an aspect of the job, the interviewer wouldn't be asking this question. Therefore, the only acceptable answer is "yes" if you want to be considered for the job. If your past jobs involved overtime, now would be the time to tell this to the interviewer.

A-6: What book are you currently reading (or what was the last book you read)? What were the last three books that you read?

The only correct answer is to offer the title of a nonfiction book, preferably one that is on a subject related to your career or business in general. For example, if you are a sales person, tell the reader you're currently in the middle of, "Selling for Dummies." Alternatively, if that seems too much of a cliché, offer the title of a book on improving your time management, personality, efficiency, etc. Of course, we are not suggesting that you lie and claim to be reading a book that you aren't really reading. As part of your job search, you will have to start reading one or two acceptable books so that you can intelligently discuss them if the subject is brought up during an interview. The interviewer might ask you how the book is helping you (what you have learned from it), so have an answer ready. Some interviewers will try to determine if you regularly read by asking you for titles of 3-5 books you've read this year, so be ready.

A-7: What is the last movie that you saw?[Back to Menu](#)

Replying that you "don't have time to watch movies as you are completely devoted to your job" is not a good answer and will not win you any points, even if the interviewer was dumb enough to believe you. Interviewers are looking for well-rounded people who enjoy healthy activities, such as relaxation and entertainment, and will expect you to state the name of a movie. The movie title that you give in reply to this question should always be one that is popular with the general public, but uncontroversial, meaning that it doesn't have any negative or zealous political or religious overtones. Also, don't reveal the fact that you spend way too much time watching movies by stating you have seen a particular movie 15 times or that you spend too much time watching movies. For example, don't tell the interviewer that you are obsessed with Star Trek movies and regularly attend Star Trek conventions dressed up as Mr. Spock. A well-known uncontroversial movie, popular with the general public, and one that the interviewer is likely to have seen, is always a good choice.

A-8: What are your hobbies and interests outside of work?

The interviewer is trying to find out (1) more about whom you are and (2) if you maintain an interest in a particular subject for a long period. You should not indicate that you change hobbies frequently or have a problem maintaining an interest in one subject over a long period. A good answer might be, "I have been interested in genealogy for the past five years. I am currently the President of the Adams County Genealogical Society and we meet once a month to exchange research tips. So far, I have discovered that I am the descendent of two civil war generals and Thomas Edison as well. It's very interesting, but I don't have much time with my busy schedule to do much research now, but I plan to spend much more time doing research after I retire." Answers that reveal participation in sports are also good: "For the past five years I have been an avid racquetball player. I've competed in a dozen or so competitions and I've won a few." Of course, you do not want to reveal any hobby or activity that most people would consider strange, such as "I collect potato chips that look like celebrities" or "I collect the autographs of convicted serial killers."

A-9: What do you like to watch on television?

In answering this question, one should not appear too silly or too arrogant. Therefore, avoid revealing the fact that you have seen every episode of the Brady Bunch 200 times or that you race home from work everyday to hear the Gilligan's Island theme song. Don't swing the other way and claim that you never watch television or only watch PBS and C-SPAN because they will know you're lying or think you are weird or boring. The best answer reveals that you do watch television, but you watch respectable, very popular programs such as "Law and Order" or "CSI." Never admit to being a couch potato who sits in front of the TV five hours every day.

Good answer 1: "I don't watch that much television. I try to catch the news everyday, I like to watch the political programs on Sunday mornings, and football in the fall. "60 Minutes" is probably my favorite program. My family and I usually find a movie to watch on Saturday and Sunday nights. Sometimes we rent a few movies on weekends, but I don't really have any favorite programs I watch consistently every week."

Good answer 2: "I enjoy watching "Friends" just like millions of other Americans. I get together with six or so friends at a pizza place on Thursday nights and we watch it together. I rent a few movies on most weekends, and I do try to catch the news every morning when I'm getting ready for work. I don't have that much time for television because I work and go to school full time. And the last thing I want to do after sitting all day in class and at work is to come home and sit some more in front of a television. In my free time, I usually go to the gym, walk my dog and spend time with my friends and family rather than watch television."

A-10: What jobs did you have as a teenager?[Back to Menu](#)

Answer this question honestly. Either you had jobs or you didn't. Household chores, mowing lawns, shoveling snow, and lemonade stands all count as jobs.

Good answer 1: "I worked part-time at both Burger King and McDonalds between the ages of 16 and 20 in order to earn money to buy my first car and help my parents pay for my college education. I was able to handle both work and school without my grades suffering. And when I was younger, around 13 to 16 years old, I babysat for families in the neighborhood on weekends."

Good answer 2: "I didn't have any jobs as a child other than chores I was expected to do around the house such as helping my parents with housekeeping, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, and babysitting my younger sister and brother. My parents placed tremendous emphasis on academics and extracurricular activities, and would not allow me to work."

A-11: Who are your references?

It is a good idea to type up the names and contact information of your references on a sheet of paper and present it to the interviewer when the topic comes up. Ideally, one should provide the names of current and former supervisors as references since these are the people prospective employers most want to speak with about your work performance. Giving the names of others as references -- such as co-workers, friends, family members, etc. -- might be an indication that you do not want the interviewer to contact your supervisor. If you do not have any work history, use teachers, professors, or business people you or your family knows as references.

A good answer to this question: "I have prepared a list of references here I would like you to have. I have selected my current supervisor, Jane Doe, as my major reference since she can speak about my most recent work performance and accomplishments. I also list the names of my previous two supervisors at Acme, Jack Wilson and Norma Smith."

If one does not have any work references, a good answer might be, "I asked two of my engineering professors to be references for me and they agreed to do so. I typed up their names, phone numbers and contact information on this sheet of paper. They can attest to the work I completed as an intern over the past two years. I also list Mrs. Sally Wilson, who is a prominent attorney and a friend of the family. She has known me since I was a child and can attest to my character."

A-12: Do you mind if I contact your references?

You should always inform your present employer that you are looking for a new position and someone will be contacting them to discuss your work history. If you don't want your current boss to know you're searching for a new job, then tell the interviewer that: "I would prefer that you not contact my current employer as she is not aware that I am looking for another position, but you may contact Mr. Jack Smith, my former supervisor at Acme. He supervised me for four years and agreed to be a reference for me. Of course, if you decide to offer me this position, please let me know so that I can inform my current employer, and then, yes, you may contact her once I have received an offer of employment and given notice."

On the other hand, you might have already informed your current employer that you're interviewing for other jobs. In this case, your answer might be, "Yes, you may contact my present supervisor, Mrs. Smith. She is well aware of the fact that I am searching for a new position and knows that you will be calling her in the near future."

A-13: Will you take a lie-detector test?[Back to Menu](#)

The interviewer is asking this question (1) because it is a requirement to get the job, or (2) to find out if you are afraid of the prospect of taking such a test. Therefore, the only correct answer to this question is "Yes, I would be willing to take a lie detector test." You don't need to say anything else.

A-14: How do you feel about air travel?

Obviously, the interviewer wouldn't be asking this question if traveling by air wasn't an important component of the job, so the only correct way to answer this question is "No, I have no problem with air travel." You might want to expand your answer by telling the interviewer that you traveled a lot in a previous job or in your personal life. If you tell the interviewer you are afraid of flying or cannot do so for some other reason, such as a medical condition, you will not get the job offer.

A-15: Have you ever owned your own business?

The best answer to this question is yes since it shows initiative and that you have had some experience marketing services or products. Good answer: "Yes, I ran my own business while in high school. I went door-to-door asking people if they needed their lawns mowed. I earned quite a sum of money in just a few months, enough to pay for a car and my first year of college."

A-16: Are you in good health?

The interviewer is asking this question because providing health insurance to employees costs employers a small fortune. Consequently, many employers prefer to hire those who try to maintain their health to keep the number of claims down and insurance rates as low as possible. Keep in mind that employers can find out your medical history and many of them make the job offer contingent upon your passing a physical examination, therefore, it wouldn't be a good idea to blatantly lie about your medical history. That doesn't mean you should offer information you don't have to, such as "I smoked cigarettes for thirty years, but gave them up last year" or "I've had two heart attacks and a stroke". If your health is generally good, then answer this question briefly: "Yes, I'm in good health" or "I have no health problems that would prevent me from doing this job" and don't elaborate further.

A-17: What do you do to maintain your health?

Obviously, if you're in good shape, answering this question is easy: "I jog two or three nights a week and lift weights at the Acme Gym three times a week. I try to eat a balanced diet; I eat lots of salads and try to maintain my weight."

If you're overweight or obese (as are 65% of adult Americans) answering this question isn't going to be easy. Sample answer: "Well, obviously I'm overweight, so I can't tell you that I get up and jog for an hour every day, but I do walk my dogs for 45 minutes every night. I recently started the Atkins program and have already lost seven pounds. It's a diet I can live with, so I know this time I'll be able to lose all the weight and start taking better care of my health."

A-18: Do you have any physical problems that would limit your ability to perform this job?

Employers have to be very careful about asking this question as too much prying can violate your civil rights. Therefore, they won't ask too many prying questions and you don't need to offer them very much information. The best way to answer this question is to keep it short and simple: "No, I don't have any physical problems that would affect my ability to perform this job."

A-19: What organizations are you a member of?

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The interviewer is interested in work-related memberships, not personal ones. The fact that you are a member of the American Business Association is more important than the fact you participate in your local PTA (which reveals the fact that you have children). It is also a good idea not to reveal religious and political affiliations, such as memberships in the Christian Business Association or the Republican Party or ethnic and cultural affiliations.

A-20: How do you balance career and family?

On the surface this questions appears to be illegal (see Section G), but it isn't the way that it's worded. The interviewer is hoping you will reveal information about things he isn't allowed to ask, such as if you are married, single, divorced, have children, or are straight or gay. If you don't want to reveal information about your personal life, offer a vague simple answer: "I haven't had a problem balancing my work and private life. One has never interfered with the other. I am capable of getting the work I need to get done without it interfering with my personal life."

On the other hand, you might want to reveal a great deal of information if you think it will help you get the job offer: "I can easily balance my career and family life as my children are now in college and my wife is starting a new career as a real estate agent. We both work hard and have flexible schedules to work when we need to, but we still have a good personal life, spending time with friends and family every week."

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Subsection B. Work Experience and Skills Questions

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[B-19: Tell me what you do on a typical day at work.](#)

B-1: What is your greatest strength (or strengths)?

Provide one or two strengths that are work-related and give the interviewer an example that proves you have that strength. Sample answer: "I have the ability to train and motivate people. For example, at Acme Corporation, employee turnover was sixty percent. To try to find out why, I interviewed more than 200 employees. I discovered that a major reason for the high turnover was lack of proper training and low morale. To try to resolve the problem, I developed a training program that helped workers perform their jobs better and got them motivated to do a better job. Each training session lasted only two days, but the results were very impressive -- productivity improved 30 percent and employee turnover dropped by more than half."

B-2: What is your greatest weakness (or weaknesses)?

Don't answer this question by claiming that you have no weaknesses. Confess a real weakness that you have, but choose one that isn't particularly relevant to the job you're seeking if you can. Do not answer with phony weaknesses such as "I'm a slave to my job." Just state the weakness, tell the interview how it has harmed you in your work life, and what steps you have taken to improve it. A good step one can take to improve a weakness is to read self-help books on the subject. You might offer the title of a book you've read that helped you improve your weakness.

Sample answer 1: "A major weakness I had in the past was delegating work to others and trusting them to do it correctly. In my early career, this caused some problems for me in that my subordinates were unhappy because they felt I lacked confidence in them. I would try to do the work myself or look over their shoulders while they were doing the work. This problem was brought to my attention by my supervisor in a performance review. I agreed with her on this point and admitted I needed to change so I read a few self-help books that helped me change my thinking and let go of the idea that I needed to micromanage my work environment in order to get the job done. Now, I have no problem delegating work to subordinates."

Sample answer 2: "I'm a very shy person until I get to know a person. Being shy has cost me a great deal in my career as it has prevented me from getting promotions and jobs I've wanted. A few years ago, I realized I would have to change or I wasn't going to achieve my career goals. I read several self-help books on the subject, "Getting Over Your Shyness" was one, and I

summoned up the courage to take a speech class at night. The teacher was excellent and was able to convince me how shyness is just an irrational fear. Although I'll always be shy, I'm not nearly as shy as I used to be and I've greatly improved my ability to communicate with others by taking several more speech classes. Now, I can get up in front of a large group of people and give a lengthy presentation without a problem."

Bad answer: "I have a major weakness for chocolate." Although this is a weakness, to offer this as an answer is to sidestep the question and will turn off the interviewer.

B-3: Do you work better alone or as part of a team?

If the position you're applying for requires you to spend lots of time alone, then of course, you should state that you like to work alone and vice versa. Never sound too extreme one way or another. Don't say that you hate people and would "die if you had to work with others" and don't state that you "will go crazy if you're left alone for five minutes". A healthy balance between the two is always the best choice. If you have previous experience illustrating the fact that you can work alone or with others, then offer it. For example, you might state that in your previous job you spent a significant amount of time alone while traveling, or that you have learned how to get along well with people in the workplace by working on numerous team projects.

B-4: Do you consider yourself to be organized? Do you manage your time well?

The interviewer wants to hear about your work skills concerning time and task management, not that you have neatly separated the paperclips in your desk drawer into different trays based on size. A model answer might be "I manage my time very well. I routinely complete tasks ahead of schedule. For example, . . . (offer the interviewer proof of your organizational skills by telling him about a major project that you organized and completed on time or mention the fact that you consistently received an outstanding grade on previous performance reviews regarding your time management). Do not reveal to the interviewer that you are habitually late or that you complete tasks at the very last minute.

B-5: Do you consider yourself to be a risk-taker?

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How you answer this question depends on the type of company it is. If it is a start-up company or within a highly-competitive industry, then they are probably looking for those more willing to take risks. If you believe the company is this type, then offer an example of a risk you've taken in business. If the company is a well-established industry leader, risk takers are not as highly valued. Of course, no company is looking for employees who are foolish in their risk-taking behavior, so a good rule of thumb is to place yourself somewhere in the middle -- you are neither too foolish nor overly cautious.

B-6: Are you a self-starter?

The correct answer to this question is always "yes", and the ideal answer includes an example of how you are able to work with minimal supervision, keep your skills current without being told, or a time when you took it upon yourself to be more efficient, accurate or productive.

Example 1: "Yes, I am definitely a self-starter. When I worked at Acme Corporation, I was positive that the firm would be adopting a new operating system within a year, so I started taking classes at the local university at night in order to prepare myself. I was the only one in the office that knew how to operate the equipment when it was installed, so I was appointed trainer and subsequently trained 200 co-workers. I did receive a reward for my work on that project."

Example 2: "Yes, I am a self-starter. I am always thinking of ways I can improve office efficiency and help the company be more profitable. For example, a few years ago I noticed that the sales reps were having a very difficult time finding client files when they called. The sales reps would

put clients on hold and spend sometimes as much as five minutes frantically trying to locate a file. I took it upon myself to design a file management system that enabled the sales reps to locate client files on their desktops in less than 15 seconds. This has made the office much more efficient and, of course, made both the sales reps and our clients much happier."

B-7: How do you react to criticism from supervisors that you consider unjust?

The only correct way to answer this question is to present yourself as a person who can handle criticism without becoming angry, defensive, vengeful or arrogant, yet, not let others intimidate or blame you when you don't deserve it. Example: "There was a time when I was deeply hurt when a supervisor pointed out a mistake I made or an area in which I needed to improve and felt somewhat defensive. However, through the years, I have learned that no one is perfect; everyone makes mistakes and needs to improve in certain areas, so I shouldn't take criticism so personally. Therefore, I have learned to take it on the chin without becoming defensive or feeling hurt. I just take a few days to think about what was said and if I feel the criticism is warranted, I take steps to improve my performance. If I feel the criticism was unjustified, I will sit down with my supervisor and calmly discuss the reasons why I feel the criticism was unjustified."

B-8: How well do you handle change?

The only acceptable answer is one stating you handle change very well. Don't just make this claim; offer an example of how well you coped with a major change that took place in your work environment. A common shakeup occurs when your employer brings in new automation or changes its culture. In any event, tell the interviewer what you did to cope or adapt to a change that occurred with a previous employer -- and this should be a major change, not a minor one.

B-9: Are you opposed to doing a lot of routine work?

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Don't answer with, "Oh yes, I will enjoy filing eight hours a day, 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year!" Instead, try to assure the interviewer you aren't going to go mad doing your boring job. For example, "I know this position requires a lot of routine work, but I don't expect to start at the top. I'm willing to start at the bottom and prove myself. Eventually, I will be assigned tasks that require more brain power."

B-10: How do you resolve disputes with co-workers and handle conflicts?

Don't claim that you have never had a dispute with a co-worker. The interviewer will know you are fibbing, since getting along with all co-workers is unusual -- there's always at least one person you can stand. The best answer to this question tells the interviewer about a dispute you had with a co-worker and how you resolved it so that the outcome was positive. Your answer should tell the interviewer how you resolved it on your own, and hopefully, that you and this other person are now friends, or at least are able to work together productively. Also, concentrate on offering an example of how you resolved a work-related conflict rather than disclosing a personal feud over some petty subject. For example, telling the interviewer about your problems getting a co-worker to take your suggestions on a specific project seriously is a much better topic than telling the interviewer about your feud with another over a parking space. In addition, don't tell the interviewer that you resolved a dispute by tattling to the boss or trying to get the other person fired. Employers are sick of dealing with employee conflicts and they want a mature person who can resolve conflicts on her own without tattling or complaining to the boss.

B-11: What reference books do you use at work?

One should not answer this question, "I don't have any reference books." A good, safe answer is to state that you use a dictionary on a regular basis and one or two other books that are relevant to your field. For example, if you are a sales person you might respond, "I keep a dictionary handy and the book that helped me succeed in sales, "How to Win Friends and Influence

People." If your work involves accounting, then mention a few accounting reference books; if your work involves computer programming, and then mention a few relevant books, etc.

B-12: Have you ever held a position that wasn't right for you?

One can answer this question either yes or no, but answering "no" would be better. If you answer yes, then you need to explain the mistake you made in exercising good judgment, and a good reason is always the lure of more money. For example, one might answer: "A good friend of mine convinced me that I could make six figures quite easily selling real estate, so I gave up my job as an office manager and jumped right in. I soon realized I wasn't cut out for that world because there were too many players and I didn't have the necessary connections. Had I known that fewer than 10% of real estate agents manage to make a decent living, I never would have entered the field. I stayed in real estate for a year before I realized I was not going to make a six figure income, so I quit and found another position as an office manager, which is work that I am good at and like doing."

B-13: What is your most significant career accomplishment?

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Just answer this question honestly. You don't have to be Albert Einstein and say "I discovered the theory of relativity." A good answer: "I think my most significant career accomplishment is rising from a receptionist to a district manager at Acme in just five years. I started there with no education and no training, and I worked hard all day and went to school at night until I earned a master's degree in management." Another good answer: "I think my most significant career accomplishment was winning the XYZ account at Acme, which brought my employer \$30 million in sales and help establish the company as an international player. It wasn't easy winning that account because we were competing with a dozen or so competitors who could offer a more high-tech product at a lower price, but I was able to put together a package that convinced the management at XYZ that our company was better for them in the long-term."

B-14: Are you comfortable working for a large company?

The interviewer might be asking this question because your employment history shows you've always worked for smaller companies. Always answer this question in the positive, "Yes, I would be very comfortable working for a large company. I believe that working for a large company would not only provide more opportunities for advancement and growth, but would also expose me to more areas in my field."

B-15: Are you comfortable working for a small company?

The interviewer might be asking this question because your employment history shows you've always worked for larger companies and doubts you will be able to fit in to a new environment. Always answer this question in the positive, "Yes, after working for a large corporation the past five years, I look forward to working for a small company where employees work more closely with one another and there is more of an informal team-effort rather than the cold, impersonal corporate atmosphere. I did work for smaller companies at the start of my career and have always missed that atmosphere and look forward to it again."

B-16: How long do you think you will work for us?

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When answering this question, keep in mind that it costs employers a small fortune to hire you. They have to spend thousands recruiting and training you, therefore, they don't want you to stay for just a few months or years and then quit. However, don't assume the interviewer wants your answer to be "I will be your most devoted employee until I retire forty years from now", particularly if your resume indicates you generally stay with one employer for five years (as most Americans do) before moving on.

Many HR experts recommend that you answer this question: "I will stay as long as I continue to grow and make a positive contribution to the company" but this answer has become somewhat of a cliché. Formulate your answer based on your age, your field, and your work history.

Good answer 1: "If I am offered this position, I plan to stay with this company until I retire about ten years from now. At this time in my life, I've begun to plan for my eventual retirement. This position offers an excellent retirement package and seems to come with many opportunities for growth, and I think I would have exciting and challenging work to perform for the remainder of my career."

Good answer 2: "If I am offered this position, I plan to stay with this company for a long time since there are many opportunities for growth and the position is one that would enable me to do quite a bit of software development work, which is my passion. This position gives me the opportunity to learn many different facets of the software development process and it will take me awhile to achieve everything I want to achieve at this job."

B-17: Do you anticipate problems or just react to them?

The correct answer to this question is that you try to anticipate problems rather than react to them. You should then give a brief outline of a time when you caught a problem and resolved it before it did damage to the company. Good answer: "I always try to anticipate problems and resolve them before they occur. For example, at Acme I knew that there were bugs in the system that would eventually surface. I was able to catch numerous problems with the network before they occurred by running tests on the system to locate these bugs. I was able to locate and fix these errors with the network design that had they gone undiscovered would have resulted in a significant period of system downtime. By anticipating this problem and fixing it, I was able to reduce network downtime to almost zero."

B-18: How do you handle (resolve) problems with co-workers?

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Employers want employees who can resolve problems with co-workers on their own without getting a supervisor involved and who can work well with co-workers without disrupting the work environment. Therefore, a good answer to this question tells the interviewer that you have had conflicts with co-workers (because everyone has) but you resolved them on your own. Good answer: "I haven't had that many conflicts with co-workers, but there was one particular co-worker who would make sarcastic, biting remarks to me while we worked. I think she was jealous because I was much younger than she was and the only other female in the sales department. Finally, one day I sat down with her and asked her why she was so sarcastic to me. She denied it, but the comments did stop after that. Eventually, we became friends."

B-19: Tell me what you do on a typical day at work.

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The interviewer is trying to discover (1) if you exaggerated the job duties listed on your resume and/or (2) if you have the necessary experience to do the job for them. Therefore, your answer should emphasize duties one would perform in the job you're trying to get. If you can, reread the job description and emphasize the job duties listed there. Good answer: "On a typical day, I arrive at work around 7:30 and look over various departmental reports in order to prepare myself for the morning meeting with the sales staff. From 8:30 to 10:00, I meet with a 30 member sales staff. We have training sessions, motivational sessions; we discuss problems and try to resolve them. From 10:00 to noon, I'm on the phone, chatting with various clients, department heads, and government agencies. In the afternoon, I'm either out in the field, visiting various stores in the area or attending meetings with clients."

Subsection C. Questions That Make You Squirm

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- [C-1: Why do you want to leave your present employer?](#)
- [C-2: What did your last supervisor criticize most about your performance?](#)
- [C-3: Have you ever been fired or asked to resign?](#)
- [C-4: Why haven't you received a job offer yet?](#)
- [C-5: Which previously held job do you consider to be your favorite and why?](#)
- [C-6: Would you choose the same career if you could start over again?](#)
- [C-7: Why have you stayed with the same employer for so long?](#)
- [C-8: Why have you changed jobs so frequently?](#)
- [C-9: Who was your favorite boss and least favorite boss and why?](#)
- [C-10: How could you have improved relations with your least favorite boss?](#)
- [C-11: What is the most foolish thing you've ever done?](#)
- [C-12: Have any of your past employers refused to give you a reference?](#)
- [C-13: Why are their gaps in your employment history?](#)
- [C-14: Would your present employer be surprised to know you're job hunting?](#)
- [C-15: How would your co-workers describe you?](#)
- [C-16: What would you do if a supervisor asked you to do something you knew was wrong?](#)
- [C-17: What types of people do you have trouble getting along with?](#)

C-1: Why do you want to leave your present employer?

You could state that you want a more challenging position, higher salary, or more responsibility. Don't mention personal conflicts with your present boss or bad-mouth your current employer or co-workers as this will harm your chances of being offered the job. Keep in mind that interviewers love people who are looking for more challenging positions or responsibility because it shows drive, ambition and motivation.

C-2: What did your last supervisor criticize most about your performance?

A good way to answer this question is to offer a criticism you received that is not very important or not directly related to the position you're applying for. For example, telling the interviewer that you were constantly criticized for coming to work an hour late is not a good idea. However, revealing a minor criticism and telling the interviewer what steps you took to improve yourself is a good way to answer this question. In fact, if you can state that you have already solved the problem and received a higher mark on a subsequent performance review, then say so.

C-3: Have you ever been fired or asked to resign?

When answering this question, keep in mind that the interviewer knows that almost everyone has been fired at least once and it is usually due to a personality conflict with the boss or coworkers. So, if you have been fired then admit it, but do so without attacking your former boss or employer, and without sounding defensive or bitter. Do not mention that you have been fired many times unless asked specifically, "How many times have you been fired?" Have a sense of humor when discussing your firings so that the interviewer doesn't get the idea you are a nut who might come back to the workplace with an assault rifle if you're fired. Tell the interviewer what you learned from being fired. If you have been fired many times, mention what steps you have taken to improve yourself (i.e., I have read self-help books about . . . getting along with others . . . improving my time management . . . improving knowledge, work habits, etc.). Also, point out any past jobs you held when you got along well with your boss and coworkers or received good performance reviews or a promotion.

C-4: How long have you been searching for a job? Why haven't you received a job offer? Why have you been unemployed for so long?

It is always better to answer this question with "I just started looking" but this is not always possible, particularly if your resume indicates you've been unemployed for the last six months. If you can't hide the fact that your job search has been taking awhile, then state you're being selective about whom you will work for. Of course, stating this might prompt the interviewer to ask, "What offers have you turned down?" which could land you in hot water if you haven't actually received any job offers. (It isn't a good idea to lie in answering this latter question.)

A bad economy and a crowded market are good reasons one might have trouble finding a job. However, be aware that many interviewers will hold this against you even if the job market was very bad and many people were having trouble finding employment.

C-5: What previously held job do you consider to be your favorite and why?

This is actually a trick question asked to determine if you enjoy the type of work the position you're applying for involves. Therefore, the answer to this question should be a job that requires the same or similar work that you will be required to perform in the new job. If you do not have a previous job wherein you performed similar tasks, then offer an answer that does not suggest you are ill-suited for the position. For example, if you are applying for a high-stress, demanding job in a chaotic environment, don't tell the interviewer you loved your position with Acme because of the mellow, low stress "work at your own pace" atmosphere.

C-6: Would you choose the same career if you could start over again?

How you answer this question depends on whether or not you are trying to win a job related to your career history or are trying to enter a new field. No matter how much you despise the career you originally chose, do not admit this fact to the interviewer because it tells him you consider your work to be drudge. If you are trying to enter a new field, of course, tell the interviewer that you would choose the field you're now trying to enter if you had it to do all over again -- that's why you're trying to enter it now.

C-7: Why have you stayed with the same employer for so long? [Back to Menu](#)

Just as moving from job to job too frequently can harm you, so can staying with the same employer for too long -- particularly if you've never been promoted and your resume indicates you haven't been intellectually challenged in years. Your answer should state something about your having worked successfully with many people both inside and outside of the organization, including different bosses and co-workers, as well as interacting regularly with various types of organizations and customers.

C-8: Why have you changed jobs so frequently? [Back to Menu](#)

Reasons for job-hopping should be based on your past employers' failure to challenge you, failure to give you enough opportunity for advancement, because you needed more money, or for family reasons, and never on the fact that your past employers were incompetent, dumb, or unfair. Do not indicate in any way that you are hard to get along with or get bored and leave at the drop of a hat, and make sure you point out any jobs you did hold for a long time. Mention that your current goal is long-term employment and back that up with any proof you have to want job stability such as a new baby, new marriage, new home, etc. If the job you're applying for offers you the challenges and environment you were always looking for, make sure you point out this fact.

Good answer 1: "Well, at ABC Corporation, I was hired as an entry level salesman with the promise of rapid promotion to management within one year. After a year and a half, I realized that I wasn't going to be promoted as promised and took a position elsewhere because I could not support my family without the commissions that were promised. At Acme, I was told that the job was very challenging and exciting with significant opportunities for advancement within one year, but this did not materialize. The job was very unchallenging and the company seemed to be failing. I felt like I was capable of doing much more than sitting around with little to do, so I left. I admit that my resume shows some job hopping of late, but this is why I am so interested in the position with your company. I feel certain that this position offers very challenging and interesting work, as well as opportunities for advancement for those willing to work hard. Your company is very profitable and stable and has a good reputation in the industry. I know that this will be a position I will stay with a very long time."

Good answer 2: "I do not believe that my work history is an accurate reflection of who I am. I am actually a very stable person who would enjoy very much working for the same employer for a long period. Note that on my resume, it indicates that I worked for XYZ Company for five years in the early 1990s. I admit that my resume indicates some job hopping in the late 1990s, but this was because I was caring for my elderly, sick mother between 1995 and 2001. Caring for her required being available nights and on weekends, so I was not able to work overtime as the job at Acme required. I had to resign after working there for only a year. At XYZ Industries, I had to resign after only one year because they insisted on transferring me to the west coast. I simply could not move away from my mother who was too elderly and ill to make such a move. My mother passed away in 2001, I got married a year later and had a child. Now, I have a wife and child to support and a mortgage to pay. I am eager to settle down and work for a company like yours for a long period of time."

C-9: Who was your favorite boss and why? Who was your least favorite boss and why?

These are two of the most difficult interview questions to answer unless you understand what the interviewer wants to hear, and if you realize that you can answer both questions with the same answer. Employers are looking for employees who are interested in contributing to the company and improving their job skills. So, instead of insulting or demeaning your past bosses by telling the interviewer that he was always "hogging all the credit" or was "totally incompetent", state that you wished he had offered you more feedback about your job performance, provided you with more job training, or challenged you more by providing you with more opportunities to show what you can do, etc. You can answer the question, "who was your favorite boss and why?" using the same answer: "John Doe was my favorite boss because he offered me lots of feedback about my job performance, taught me almost everything I know about marketing, and gave me plenty of opportunities to prove myself by giving me very challenging projects to complete." Never put down your past employers or blame them for anything in a demeaning or insulting way, since it makes you come across as petty.

C-10: What could you have done to improve your relationship with your least favorite boss?

Again, refrain from stating negativities about your former boss. Put a positive spin on your answer by telling the interviewer that, if you had it to do all over again, you would have requested more feedback from your boss regarding your performance and requested to be assigned more projects, etc.

C-11: What is the most foolish thing you've ever done?

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Do not answer this question by claiming that you have never done anything foolish, because everyone has done something foolish. The ideal answer would be to admit a foolish thing you did in your personal life a long time ago (perhaps as a teenager) rather than admit a foolish mistake done in your recent professional life. For example, one might answer, "When I was 14 years old,

I decided to steal my father's car keys and go for a joy ride. Unfortunately, my driving skills weren't as good as I thought they were and I crashed into a telephone pole less than a mile from home. I was so afraid of my father's reaction, that I left the car there and ran to a friend's house. I did do some other silly things as a kid, but fortunately, I've never done anything I consider to be foolish as an adult or at work. Of course, I have made some mistakes at work, but I've learned from them and didn't consider them to be foolish."

C-12: Have any of your past employers refused to give you a reference?

Of course, the best answer to this question is "no", but if you have to answer "yes", explain why in a professional manner. In other words, don't complain bitterly about the employer who refused to give you a reference. Sample answer: "Yes, John Wilson at Acme refuses to give me a reference because he is unhappy that I resigned from the company. This is unfortunate because John and I really liked each other and worked well together. I did receive excellent performance reviews and two raises based on performance while at Acme, so his refusal to give me a reference is not based on poor performance. As I said, he is angry at me for resigning because he considers my doing so to be disloyal to the company." Sample answer 1: "Yes, Acme Corporation refuses to give me a reference; however, this is not based on performance. Acme has been sued many times by former employers so they have adopted the policy of confirming only job title, work dates and salary through HR. If you contact Mr. Wilson at Acme, he will likely not respond or will refer you to HR. This is not based on my performance, but rather, on company policy."

C-13: Why are there gaps in your employment history?

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Answer this question by explaining each recent gap in your work history that is longer than six months. You should try to put a positive spin on your answer. Good reasons to explain away employment gaps are that you took some time off to raise your children or to go back to school and get your degree or obtain necessary training to get a better job. Although not ideal, acceptable reasons to explain employment gaps are that you took a year off to travel or that the economy has been very bad and you simply couldn't find work in a year and a half. Don't say it was because "no one would hire me" or "I kept getting fired" without putting a positive spin on your answer. Mention that your current goal is long-term employment and back that up with any proof you have to want job stability such as a new baby, new marriage, new home, etc. If the job you're applying for offers you the challenges and environment you were always looking for, you should point out this fact.

Good answer 1: "The reason that there is a two year gap in my employment history is that I could afford to be very choosy as I had a substantial amount of money in savings, which allowed me to spend almost two years looking for the right position. I resigned from Acme Corporation because the work was very unchallenging and I wanted to make sure that I found a new position that offered me the type of challenging, interesting work and advancement for opportunities that I was searching for. So, I interviewed for many positions and was offered quite a few of them, but I turned them down because they were not right for me."

Good answer 2: "When I was younger, I did some foolish things, one of which was not having any idea of what I wanted to do with my life, so I was generally unfocused and ended up quitting several good jobs so I could attend school full-time and get the necessary training to enter a new field. The two-year employment gap between my job at Acme and XYZ Industries occurred because I was attending university full-time while my wife supported us financially. The most recent employment gap occurred because I again decided to go back to school and earn a degree so I could qualify for much better jobs."

C-14: Would your present employer be surprised to know you're job hunting?

Never answer this question with negative information such as "My current boss wouldn't be surprised in the least to hear I'm leaving since he's been trying to shove me out the door for years!" Always tell the interviewer that you are happy with your current employer and job, but are simply looking to stretch your wings out and take on a job with more challenge, and yes, more salary and opportunities for advancement.

C-15: How would your co-workers describe you?

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Obviously, you don't want to say your co-workers would describe you as a troubled loner. The only correct answer to this question is to say that they would describe you as a pleasant person who works well with others. Put forth other positive traits about yourself as well: hard-working, efficient, dependable, easy going, funny, witty, etc.

Good answer: "My coworkers would describe me as a pleasant, nice person who is very dependable and hard-working. I tend to be shy at first, but after people get to know me, I come out of my shell and am very fun to be around."

C-16: What would you do if a supervisor asked you to do something the wrong way?

The interviewer is testing how insubordinate you might be. Never answer this question by claiming you would refuse to do something the way the supervisor told you to do it unless you are required by your company or by law to follow certain procedures. Instead, tell the interviewer you would tell the supervisor you think it should be done another way, but if the supervisor insisted you do it his way, you would do so.

Good answer: "If I was aware that there was a more efficient or better way to perform a task, I would tactfully point this out to the supervisor. However, if she still wanted me to do it her way, I would do so."

C-17: What types of people do you have trouble getting along with?

You don't want to answer this question with "Hard-working people who make lazy people like me look bad." You want to be the hard-working, nice person who doesn't like lazy or difficult people. However, be careful, the position you're interviewing for might come with an unpleasant, difficult supervisor and the interviewer is asking you this question for that reason.

Good answer 1: "I don't get along well with people who don't hold up their end of the job, who are constantly coming in late or calling in sick. They don't really respect their co-workers and bring the whole organization down."

Good answer 2: "I don't get along well with people who are opinionated and close-minded. They always seem to be complaining about one thing or another and they're depressing to be around."

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Subsection D. "Why Should We Hire You?"

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D-1: Why should we hire you?

Take several minutes to answer this question, incorporating your personality traits, strengths, and experience in to the job you're applying for. A good answer is to focus on how you can benefit the company. You can best do this by matching your skills and qualifications to those needed for the job and be ready with examples of how your skills, talents, etc., mesh with the needs of that particular company.

Sample answer 1: "You should hire me because I have considerable experience and success in marketing software products to small companies. I know that your organization has not done well serving the small business sector and would like to greatly expand sales in this segment. At Acme, I was able to increase small business accounts 60 percent in just two years. At XYZ Corporation, I single-handedly brought in 260 new small business accounts in just three years, which was a company record. Currently, your company has a very high turnover rate among sales recruits, approximately 60 percent. I succeeded in reducing employee turnover by more than 30% at both Acme and XYZ. I also had great success in leading and motivating new sales recruits. A large percentage of those I have trained have gone on to be stellar performers. This is why you should hire me. I can make a positive impact on sales and help reduce your labor costs, making this company more competitive and profitable."

Sample answer 2: "I believe I am the best person for this position because you need an office manager who can work effectively with diverse employees in a very fast-paced hectic environment. I have more than a decade of experience supervising clerical workers from diverse cultures, helping them to become more productive and efficient. I have reduced employee turnover by more than 20% in the past three years, which saved my employer more than \$1 million in related hiring and training costs each of those three years. I also eliminated the need for 10% of the office staff by automating several processes, saving my employer a small fortune in labor costs. I am confident that I can resolve your current labor problems, reduce your labor costs significantly while improving worker morale and productivity."

D-2: What do you know about our company?[Back to Menu](#)

Those who answer this question with, "Not much," will probably not be offered the job. You should always research a company before the interview. Learn about their products / services, size, plans, current events, etc. If you cannot find information about a particular company, call their offices and ask the receptionist to send you information about the company in the form of a brochure, etc. You should also research the industry in which the company operates so you are up on what's happening. You can find links to research sites at http://www.resumagic.com/interview_preparation.html.

D-3: Why do you want this position?

Your answer should offer what you think are the most interesting aspects of the position. More responsibility and opportunity, including a higher salary, are acceptable answers, but state them in a way that isn't blunt. For example, "because it pays more" is not a good answer. However, stating that, "The position offers more responsibility, challenges and interesting opportunities, as well as a higher salary," is a good answer.

D-4: Why do you want to work for this company?

Don't answer this question with, "Because you advertised for an X at monster.com." Your answer should offer what you think are the most interesting aspects of the company, for example, "because it is on the cutting edge of technology" or "because you are the industry leader". The research you do on the company in order to prepare for the interview should give you an answer to this question.

D-5: When can you start?

It is customary for most employees to give at least two weeks notice to their current employer. Those in management positions are expected to give longer notice. You will not earn points if you express disrespect toward your current employer by telling the interviewer that you plan to quit your present job without giving sufficient notice. He will assume you will show his company the same amount of disrespect. It is also a good idea to tell the interviewer you plan to start learning about your new position / employer on your off-hours (i.e., reading employee training manuals, etc.) Telling the interviewer you can't begin work for a few months because you want to take some time-off is not a good idea.

D-6: What is your commitment to this job?

Most people would respond with an answer avowing a deep commitment to the company and the job; however, a better answer would be to state that your commitment would grow as you get to know the company and the people in it.

D-7: Aren't you overqualified for this job?[Back to Menu](#)

Note that employers don't like to hire overqualified people because they won't stay around long. But since it is probably obvious that you're overqualified, admit that you are, but also emphasize the positive. For example, "I am overqualified in some ways. I have more experience that is required for this job, but you are looking for someone who is an expert in X, and that's me. However, that doesn't mean I'm completely overqualified. I feel that I have much to learn in the area of X, which is a big part of this job and I know it will keep me challenged . . ."

D-8: What salary are you expecting?

Don't sell yourself short when asking for a specific salary. Studies have found that those who negotiate for a higher salary often get it. You should do some research before the job interview

so that you don't ask for too much or too little. You might be asked to justify why you are worth the salary you are asking, so be prepared with an answer (i.e., tell them how your skills and experience will benefit the company so much that your salary will be a bargain for them.)

The best salary resource on the Internet is Salary.com where you can find out what people earn at various experience levels and in every region of the USA. At the time this was written, you could search the Salary.com database free. You also need to consider the cost of living in the area you will be relocating to, if applicable. There are cost of living calculators on the Internet. A good one can be found at Homefair.com. With a cost of living calculator, you can find out how much you will have to earn in your new location to maintain the same standard of living you enjoy in your present location.

A good answer: "After doing some research at Salary.com and a few other sites on the Internet, I am asking for a starting salary of \$100,000. I base this figure on the fact that I have seven years of experience in the field and have proven myself a great asset to my past employer. I realize that this figure is \$20,000 more than I am presently earning; however, the cost of living is considerably higher in the San Francisco area and I have included an amount to cover the higher costs I would have to pay if I relocated here."

D-9: Why should we pay you the salary you're requesting?

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Answer this question by convincing the interviewer that you deserve the salary you're requesting. The best way to do this is to point out how you have benefited your past employers in terms of increasing profit, reducing expenses, improving efficiency, etc.

Good answer: "Last year I exceeded my annual sales quota by \$500,000 and gross profit by 30 percent. I achieved over \$3.5 million in sales in a two year period setting a company record for most new accounts created in one quarter. I intend to bring in much more each year for your company than I will earn. Therefore, I believe this is a very fair salary."

D-10: Are you considering offers from other employers?

It is recommended that you NOT disclose any other offers you have received or discuss the companies with whom you have interviewed. Therefore, a good answer to this question is to state that you do not have offers from other companies. (Of course, if for some reason you believe you would have a better chance of getting the job offer if you disclosed this information, then do so.)

D-11: Do you have any questions?

This question is usually one of the last questions an interviewer will ask, as it is a logical way to end the interview. Never go to an interview without preparing questions to ask beforehand. Avoid asking about salary, vacation time, employee benefits, and such until you have asked a number of other questions that demonstrate your interest in working for the company. Good questions to ask the interviewer:

Why is this position available?

Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?

How many people have held this position in the last two years?

Who would be my supervisor? To whom would I report?

Whom will I supervise?

With whom will I be working most closely?

What do you like about working for this company?

What are the current plans for expansion or cutbacks?

What kind of turnover rate does the company have?

How financially sound is this company?

What projects and assignments will I be working on?
What happened to the person that held this position before? Was he promoted or fired?
What is this company's culture, (i.e., is it rigid and formal or relaxed and flexible?)
What are the current problems facing the company (or my department)?
What do you like the most about working for this company? The least?
What is the philosophy of the company?
What do you consider to be the company's strengths and weaknesses?
What are the company's long and short term goals?
Describe the work environment.
What attracted you (the interviewer) to this organization?
Why do you enjoy working for this company?
Describe the typical responsibilities of the position.
What are the most challenging aspects of the position?
Describe the opportunities for training and professional development.
Will I receive any formal training?
What is the company's promotional policy?
Are there opportunities for advancement within the organization?
When can I expect to hear from you?
Is there any reason why you can't offer me this position today? (see question D-12 below)

You can also ask questions regarding information you found when conducting research about the company.

D-12: Is there anything else about you I should know?

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This question is usually one of the last asked. Don't answer with a simple, "No." Instead, use this question to try to get the job offer. You can do this by answering, "Yes, you should know that I really want this job. After talking with you today, I feel that this is a position that would provide me with lots of opportunities to grow and stretch my wings and I feel I could really contribute to this company. I have the sales experience and ability you're looking for and the required supervisory skills as well. Is there anything that prevents you from offering me this position today?"

D-13: What have you heard about our company that you don't like?

You will probably have to do research to answer this question, particularly if the company isn't well known and you haven't heard anything about the company. If you don't know of anything negative, then answer "I honestly haven't heard anything negative about your company. I did do some research on your company before answering your classified ad and I didn't come across anything negative." If you have heard some bad news about the company, such as the fact that it is unstable or operating in the red, then say so, "I have heard that last year's profits were way down and I am concerned about this."

D-14: What aspect of this job appeals to you the least?

In asking this question, the interviewer is trying to determine if you dislike doing a major part of your job. For example, if you're a file clerk, you obviously don't want to answer by stating that you hate to file. Like most people, you probably hate doing the routine, boring administrative tasks that everyone has to do; therefore, you might want to answer accordingly, "I don't particularly like compiling the monthly sales reports. I love the sales process, meeting and negotiating with clients, working out in the field all day. Sitting in front of a computer for a few hours each month doesn't particularly appeal to me. I know it needs to be done, and I've always done this task as required in my previous jobs, but I don't particularly like doing it."

D-15: How will you handle the parts of this job you like the least?

This question is very similar to D-14 and should be answered positively, "I will perform all of the tasks my job requires on time and to the best of my ability regardless of whether or not I enjoy them."

D-16: What are you looking for in your next job?

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A good way to answer this question is by expressing enthusiasm for the opportunity to grow and develop and be promoted to the next level. In addition, your answer should be relevant to the job you're seeking. A good answer: "In my current position, I have worked on numerous teams designing computer software products and on occasion have acted in the capacity of project manager. I am looking for a position where I can be project manager on a regular basis as I have excelled at doing that whenever I had the opportunity. I enjoy the process of leading the team, organizing and strategizing and managing the workflow in order to develop an effective product."

D-17: What did you do at your current (or last) job that increased profit, reduced expenses, or improved efficiency?

Sample answer 1: "I increased profit 30 percent my first year on the job by developing a new training program for the sales agent. Not only were sales increased, but employee turnover was cut in half."

Sample answer 2: "As file clerk, I was in charge of maintaining client records. The sales staff was having problems locating files when clients called in, so I reorganized the filing system and computerized it so that they could locate a client's file within 10 seconds without leaving their desks. This greatly improved efficiency."

Sample answer 3: "The restaurant was losing a large amount of inventory every year through employee theft, so I told the owner he should install a new security system. He took my advice and as a result employee theft was reduced significantly and the restaurant owner saved more than \$30,000 the last three years in lost inventory. The owner was also losing a lot of money due to employees submitting fake orders and such. I recommended a computerized ticketing system that reduced employee theft to almost zero and increased profits \$10,000 last year."

Sample answer 4: "As secretary at Acme, it is my responsibility to make travel arrangements for all the executives in the office. I researched travel packages on the Internet and negotiated with several vendors for discounts and was able to save \$18,000 last year in travel-related costs."

D-18: Do you know who our major competitors are?

You do not want to answer this question "No." In fact, being able to discuss who their competitors are in-depth can only help you get the job. You need to research this question before the interview and know who their top competitors are. A good answer: "Yes, your three major competitors are A, B, and C. Currently, you are the industry leader, however, B has plans to enter the X sector and challenge your dominance in this market." You might want to learn about each company's strengths and weaknesses as well. If they are publicly traded companies, you can learn more about them by examining their SEC papers. Visit http://www.resumagic.com/interview_preparation.html for links to websites.

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E-1: Why did you decide to attend X College? Are you happy with your choice?

Always state that you are happy with your choice, even if you aren't. Do not state "it was the only place that would accept you". Do not make negative statements about the school or your professors either. A good reason for choosing a particular school is that you liked the particular program they offered, or it is known for offering a good education in your particular major.

E-2: What factors did you consider in choosing your major?

A great answer is to state you have always wanted to become X since you were a child and picked your major accordingly. If you're changing career fields or applying for a position unrelated to your major, tell the interviewer you were interested in that subject at the time, but circumstances haven't taken you down a new path. Of course, you should put a positive spin on also stating that you have benefited tremendously by changing careers (learned new things, made you more hardworking, etc.).

E-3: What is your GPA? Do you feel it reflects your true abilities?

If your GPA is high, then this question is easy, "My GPA is 3.8." If your GPA is not that good, perhaps you can make it better by calculating your GPA for only coursework related to your major.

Good answer 1: "My overall GPA is not that good, 2.8; however, if you consider only my engineering coursework, my GPA is 3.8. It was the required coursework I had to take in English and political science that drug my GPA down. And no, it isn't an accurate reflection of my abilities. I had to work part-time to support myself while attending university. I had a limited amount of study time and I thought it best to spend it on engineering subjects rather than political science and English."

Good answer 2: "My GPA was 2.9. I don't believe it is indicative of my true abilities, as I am capable of getting much better grades. In fact, in high school I had a 4.0 GPA and graduated in the top 10% of my class. I got a bit sidetracked my first year of college and spent too much time socializing and attending parties. However, if you look at my transcript, you will notice my grades significantly improved the last two years of college."

E-4: How has your schooling (internships) prepared you for this position?

Don't tell the interviewer that your schooling or internship has completely prepared you for the position, because it did not. Sample answer: "My internships have prepared me for this position in that they gave me basic real-world experience in the accounting field. The most important

lesson my internships taught me is that the accounting skills I learned from college textbooks is not enough. The real world presents you with problems and situations not found in a textbook. My internships allowed me to significantly improve my skills in the areas of preparing monthly statements, handling accounts receivable and payable, and completing tax returns for small businesses and so I feel I'm a good candidate for this position as these tasks are a major part of this job."

E-5: If you had it to do over again, would you choose the same major?

Always say that you would choose the same major even if you wouldn't. If you don't, the interviewer might think you don't really know who you are or what you want, and consequently, might not be a very good worker or stay with the company very long. Good answer: "Yes, I would definitely choose the same major since I am very interested in computer science."

E-6: What was your favorite course in college and why?

Always answer this question with a serious course related to your major. Good answer: "I particularly enjoyed statistics, which might seem strange, since most people detest it. I think I liked it so much because I was particularly good at it. In fact, the professor asked me to be a tutor to other students having difficulty with the material."

E-7: How did your college experience change you?

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Obviously, your college experience prepared you to enter the workforce, but what else does the interviewer want to hear? You emerged from your college experience more well rounded, introspective, hard-working, disciplined, mature, etc. Good answer: "When I entered university four years ago I thought I knew what to expect in college and what it meant to be a teacher. But two years into college, I began to appreciate the hard work and dedication required to be a good teacher. I think my college experience changed me in that I have great respect for teachers and the education industry than I did when I first entered college."

E-8: Do you intend to further your education?

Almost every job requires learning and improving, therefore, you don't want to give an impression that you don't like learning or improving by saying, "No, I'm through with school. I never want to sit in a classroom again!" Instead, it would be better if you claim you will be earning a degree, graduate degree, taking continuing education classes, etc., even if you aren't that committed to further education.

Good answer 1: "Yes, I have less than a year of school left to complete and I intend to enroll in a few classes each semester until I earn my degree."

Good answer 2: "Yes, I am always taking classes at the local college to keep current on the latest in computer programming. I'm also required to take a few classes each year to maintain my CPA certification."

Good answer 3: "Yes, I intend to eventually go back to school part-time at night and earn my master's degree in accounting. However, I want to take a year off and get settled in a new job and home before starting."

E-9: Why were your grades not very good in school?

There are several legitimate and believable answers to this question. One might be that you had to work full-time in order to support yourself. Another might be that you just aren't very good at taking tests. In any event, if your grades were not that good, you're going to have to say something to overcome it. Don't blame it on others, such as your professors, who "were out to

get you." Take responsibility for it: "I know my grades weren't that good in school, but I've never been very good at taking tests. I don't think my grades are an accurate reflection of my ability. I feel that I know this field as well as any new graduate. I just don't do well on tests."

If you only had bad grades in an unrelated field, then it shouldn't prevent you from getting the job offer: "I made A's in engineering, but C's and D's in English literature classes I was required to take to earn my degree. I've just never enjoyed reading literature and poetry, so I wasn't particularly good at researching and writing the numerous papers that were required in these classes, so my grades were mediocre as a result."

E-10: Why didn't you participate in internship programs while in school?

Like many people, you probably had to work while attending school. If this is so, just answer with "I had to work full-time during school and wasn't able to participate in internship programs." Not all schools have enough internships available and perhaps one wasn't available. If so, a legitimate answer would be, "There weren't many internships available at Acme College as few employers in the area were willing to participate in them." If you made good grades and took a full class load, but didn't participate in internships, you might answer: "I thought it was best to take a full class load, concentrate exclusively on my studies and earn a high GPA rather than work part-time and let my studies suffer." In any event, don't leave the interviewer with the impression that you weren't motivated or were more interested in lounging by the pool than working when you weren't in school.

E-11: Why are you applying for a job unrelated to your internship experiences?

A good answer to this question is to state that your internship opportunities were not related to the career path you wanted to concentrate on and you took the internships just to get some experience in the field or that you learned from your internship experience that you liked a particular area of your chosen field.

Good answer 1: "There were a limited number of internships and I did not have the luxury of picking and choosing from many internships that matched my areas of interest. I thought it was better for me to get some experience in the field, even if it was in an area of accounting that didn't particularly interest me."

Good answer 2: "I thought I wanted to concentrate my career in tax accounting, but after working for several large CPA firms, I decided that I enjoy auditing much more than I do tax accounting and decided to pursue this particular area of accounting instead."

E-12: Why are you applying for a job not related to your degree? [Back to Menu](#)

This is a tricky question because you can't simply answer, "I decided after graduating that I don't like my degree choice and will work in another field instead." If you can't find a job in your chosen field and are interviewing for other jobs, then just say so: "As I'm sure you know, thousands of computer-related jobs have been outsourced to other countries and many of us have been left unemployed and unable to find work in the field. Therefore, I'm concentrating on finding a position that utilizes my accounting skills."

Of course, if you are a liberal arts graduate, chances are high you won't find a job that requires a degree in history, political science, English, etc., and so you have a good excuse: "I majored in history because I love the subject; however, there are few jobs that require a history degree. Like most liberal arts majors, I would probably have to earn a master's or doctorate in history and get a teaching certificate in order to fully utilize my degree. I don't know if I will ever go back to school and earn an advanced degree, but in the meantime, I need to work and support myself and have chosen this field as one in which I would enjoy working."

E-13: What extracurricular activities did you participate in?

You want to come across as a well-rounded student, but not a party animal. Don't answer this question by saying you participated in numerous fraternity events. Instead, focus on extracurricular activities that had something to do with your major: "I participated in the Student Accounting Association. We met weekly, studied together, discussed accounting problems, held fund raising events and socialized. I was also a member of the University Student Computer Association. This year we won a region-wide contest in computer programming beating out 53 other university computer associations by creating a program that"

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[F-1: Have you ever fired anyone?](#)

[F-2: How do you motivate employees?](#)

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[F-5: What experiences have influenced your management style?](#)

[F-6: Who have you patterned your management style after?](#)

F-1: Have you ever fired anyone?

The interviewer does not want you to express either too much indifference or too much sympathy for those you have had to fire. Tell the interviewer how you discussed the employee's shortcomings with him several times and tried to help him improve, but as a last resort, you had no choice but to fire the person.

F-2: How do you motivate employees?

There is not a simple way to motivate all people due to the vast number of personality types and situations in which people work. The best answer is one that tells the interviewer that each employee must be uniquely motivated. You should offer several examples of situations where employees were successfully motivated.

F-3: What is your management philosophy?

Your management philosophy should be one that is fair and balanced, meaning that you are neither a dictator nor a pushover. Good answer: "I believe that a manager's job is to balance company goals with worker satisfaction in order to make the operation as efficient and profitable as possible. This means hiring the right people, delegating work as needed, treating all workers fairly and motivating them to do the best job possible. A good manager must also try to anticipate problems before they happen and in order to accomplish this, one cannot be a dictator or distant and reserved from his subordinates, as they will not be properly motivated to assist in this process."

F-4: What type of management style do you believe is most effective?

This question is similar to F-3 above and can be answered the same way. Generally, managers should not be dictators or pushovers. Sample answer: "I believe that a manager's job is to balance company goals with worker satisfaction in order to make the operation as efficient and profitable as possible. For example, a big part of Wal-Mart's success is the management philosophy of Sam Walton, who believed taking care of his employees was just as important as taking care of his customers. You don't see that much anymore, which is why so many companies are not nearly as profitable as they could be." Note that many companies do not place very much importance on employee satisfaction and therefore, the sample answer above might not get you the job. If you can, research a company before the interview to find out more about its culture in order to formulate an answer that will impress the interviewer.

F-5: What experiences have influenced your management style?

Tell the interviewer about a past experience or two that influenced the way you manage. Sample answer: "When I was an entry level manager at Acme, there was an extremely abrasive and rude executive who had thoroughly intimidated his employees, and they in turn couldn't stand him. As a result, employee turnover was around 80 percent. The company spent a fortune hiring and firing new sales and marketing professionals, who were unmotivated to do a good job and lasted maybe a year before they became fed up with the tyrannical boss and resigned. As a result, our branch office was the lowest performing division in the country and I don't think the

people at corporate headquarters ever understood why. This experience taught me that one must be approachable and listen to subordinates in order to be an effective manager. When I left Acme, and became CEO of XYZ Industries, I made sure that the sales and marketing staff were well trained and motivated, and felt free to come to me with their problems and suggestions. As a result, my division was ranked in the top 10 percent each year that I was CEO and employee turnover was extremely low."

F-6: Who have you patterned your management style after?

Think of a manager you have worked under or have learned about and tell the interviewer why you admire his or her management style. Good answer: "I patterned my management style after Frank Johnson, who was the CEO of Acme Corporation. I did so because he was the most effective manager I have ever known. His subordinates loved him, and worked hard for him. As a result, the company had a very low turnover rate and profits were very high. I think this was because the employees were so motivated to do a good job for him. He was very fair and friendly to the staff, but he wasn't a pushover. He required his employees to respect him, but they were not afraid to approach him and give input, and he would listen to them and adopt their suggestions much of the time. I was an entry level manager at the time and I decided back then I was going to adopt his management philosophy because I think it was why Acme was and still is the industry leader and considered to be one of the top companies to work for."

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Subsection G. Illegal Interview Questions

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- [G-1: How old are you?](#)
- [G-2: Are you married or single?](#)
- [G-3: How many children do you have?](#)
- [G-4: Are you planning to have \(more\) children?](#)
- [G-5: What is your religion?](#)
- [G-6: Have you ever been arrested?](#)
- [G-7: What is your nationality?](#)

Federal and state legislation prohibits employers from asking certain questions during the interview based on race, religion, creed, sex and age. Not all employers are familiar with these laws, particularly small employers. What should you do if you are asked one of these illegal questions? Experts say if you want the job, you should ignore their illegality and answer the questions. Others recommend that you very tactfully point out that the question is illegal. Whatever you decide to do, keep in mind that if you offend the interviewer, you will not get the job offer.

Questions employers are not supposed to ask job applicants:

- (01) What was your maiden name?
- (02) When were you born?
- (03) When did you graduate from high school?
- (04) What is your race?
- (05) Do you have physical or mental disabilities?
- (06) Do you have a drug or alcohol problem?
- (07) Are you taking any prescription drugs?
- (08) Would working on weekends conflict with your religion?
- (09) What country are you a citizen of?
- (10) Have you ever been arrested?
- (11) What language did you speak in your home when you were growing up?

Employers can usually obtain the information sought in the questions above by rephrasing the question. Compare the illegal questions above with the legal ones below:

- (01) What is your name?
- (02) Are you over 18?
- (03) Did you graduate from high school?
- (04) No questions about race are allowed.
- (05) Can you perform [specific tasks pertinent to the job description]?
- (06) Can you perform [specific tasks pertinent to the job description]?
- (07) Can you perform [specific tasks pertinent to the job description]?
- (08) Would you be able to meet the job's requirement to frequently work weekends?
- (09) Do you have the legal right to work in the United States?
- (10) Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
- (11) This job requires that you speak Spanish. Do you?

What should you do if asked an illegal question? If you want the job it wouldn't be wise to point out to the interviewer that he has asked a bad question. Instead, just answer it unless it offends you so much that you feel the need to point out the insult. You can simply respond, "I'm sorry, but I don't feel that question is relevant to the position for which I'm interviewing." Of course, if you do this, chances are you will offend the interviewer and you won't get the job.

Another tactic to win more job offers is to volunteer information that it is illegal for the interviewer to ask. For example, if you're a young female you know that the interviewer is concerned that you're planning to start a family soon or already have a house full of young children that might

interfere with your job. Since he isn't supposed to ask you anything about children you can volunteer this information: "I decided a long time ago that I do not want to have children, so I have no family obligations now or in the future that could prevent me from traveling extensively if offered this position" OR "My children are away at college now, so I can work late and on weekends if necessary."

G-1: How old are you?

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Employers are not allowed to ask age-related questions, such as your birth date or the year you graduated from high school in order to determine your age. However, it isn't hard to guess a person's age from their appearance or from the work history that appears on a resume. An employer can ask you to verify that you are at least 18 years old. Why do employers ask age-related questions? An employer might be concerned that you are either too young or too old to do the job, but usually, the discrimination is against the old rather than the young. So, there are two ways you can answer this question: (1) Tell them it is illegal to ask this question and you will be reporting them to the proper authorities (and not get the job offer); or (2) emphasize the positive without giving out your exact age. Good answer: "I assume you're asking me this question because you might be concerned that I am not up on the latest in computer science because of my age. I am over 40 and know significantly more about computer software than I did when I graduated from college at the age of 22. I have kept up with the latest developments in computer science, and in addition, I have considerable experience in the field."

G-2: Are you married or single (separated or divorced)?

Although it is illegal to do so, an employer asks this question to try to determine how much time you might be asking off from work in the future. If you're married with three kids, the employer assumes you will want to take a two week vacation rather than just one week. If you're a young woman of child-bearing age, you might be taking extended maternity leaves in the future. You might need to take extra time off from work for your kids when they are sick, need to go to the doctor, or when they participate in school and sporting events. All of this costs the employer money in one way or another; therefore, you might be discriminated against.

If you feel that answering this question honestly will result in discrimination, then answer it but don't reveal any information that you don't have to reveal. For example, if you're a young woman planning to have kids in the upcoming years, don't reveal this fact. Instead, answer with "I am married" and say nothing more.

If you feel that answering this question honestly would give you a better chance of getting the job, then ignore the fact that it's illegal and offer a detailed answer: "I became divorced last year. Before that, I was married for 20 years and have two grown children aged 20 and 18. Both are away at college so I don't have any family obligations that would interfere with work."

G-3: How many children do you have?

Women with young children have two full-time jobs. Being a mother often requires taking time off from work to meet the children's needs. Asking this illegal question is a means to determine how much time you will be taking off from work and how much your kid will interfere with your work. Employers who ask this question are looking to discriminate against women with young children.

Good answer: "I have two small children ages 4 and 6. My parents, who are retired, live less than a mile from me and care for them while I'm at work. They are also able to care for them if the children get sick and can take them to doctors' appointments and such for me. If I need to work late or go out of town as part of my job, they can care for them. My children will not interfere with my work since I have such good, reliable child care."

G-4: Are you planning to have (more) children?[Back to Menu](#)

This is also an illegal question. The interviewer is concerned about the length of time you will be taking off in the future in the form of maternity leave, sick days, etc. This question is usually asked of woman of childbearing age and is intended to discriminate. If you answer this question honestly, "I plan to have six more children in the next six years" then you will not get the job. If you answer with, "I do not plan to have any more children. The two kids I have are 13 and 15 and I'm done having children", then you will not be discriminated against.

G-5: What is your religion?

This is an illegal question and there is really no basis for asking it other than nosiness and discrimination. If there is any one interview question you should answer with "I don't believe that question is relevant to the position" it would be this question. Of course, if you live in a community where the vast majority of people are of the same religion as yourself, then there is no reason not to answer it if it doesn't offend you.

G-6: Have you ever been arrested?

Generally, this question is illegal; however, there are a few jobs where this question is allowed (police officer, FBI agent). Employers can ask whether you have been convicted. In some states, employers can ask if you have been convicted of a felony (they can't ask about misdemeanors). In other states, employers can ask if you've been convicted of a misdemeanor as well.

How should you answer if you have been convicted of a felony? If your conviction was a long time ago, a background search might not reveal it. Many companies who perform background checks do not check older records. Some background checkers who do locate felony convictions that occurred a long time ago, do not reveal them to the employer on the grounds that everyone should have a fresh start. If you're concerned, you might hire a background checker to check yourself out and see what you discover.

G-7: What is your nationality?[Back to Menu](#)

This is an illegal question, but many interviewers can determine your nationality by your race, accent, and name. They are allowed to ask you this question: "What languages do you speak other than English", which might also reveal your nationality. You can answer by telling the interviewer the question is illegal, but a better answer might be to just reveal your nationality and, if you are not a citizen, inform the interviewer that you are allowed to work in the United States, which is probably what the interviewer really wants to know.

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Subsection H. Questions to Ask At the Interview

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One of the last questions the interviewer will ask you is "Do you have any questions?" If you reply with a simple "No" you are telling the interviewer that you aren't really interested in the job or the company. You should always prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer before going to the interview. Below are some possible questions you might want to ask during a job interview. Avoid asking about salary, vacation time, employee benefits, etc. until you have asked a number of other questions that demonstrate your interest in working for the company. You will impress the interviewer if you ask questions that indicate you've done some research beforehand, such as "I read in the Wall Street Journal last week that your company is planning to expand its retail operations in the region. Could you give me more details about the company's plans for expansion?"

Good questions to ask the interviewer:

Why is this position available?

Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?

How many people have held this position in the last two years?

Who would be my supervisor? To whom would I report?

Whom will I supervise?

With whom will I be working most closely?

What do you like about working for this company?

What are the current plans for expansion or cutbacks?

What kind of turnover rate does the company have?

How financially sound is this company?

What projects and assignments will I be working on?

What happened to the person that held this position before? Was he promoted or fired?

What is this company's culture? (Ex: Is it rigid and formal or relaxed and flexible?)

What are the current problems facing the company (or my department)?

What do you like the most about working for this company? The least?

What is the philosophy of the company?

What do you consider to be the company's strengths and weaknesses?

What are the company's long and short term goals?

Describe the work environment.

What attracted you (the interviewer) to this organization?

Why do you enjoy working for this company?

Describe the typical responsibilities of the position.

What are the most challenging aspects of the position?

Describe the opportunities for training and professional development.

Will I receive any formal training?

What is the company's promotional policy?

Are there opportunities for advancement within the organization?

When can I expect to hear from you?

Ending the Job Interview

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If you're interested in the position, let the interviewer know this by stating at the end of the interview: "I am very interested in this position. Is there anything that prevents you from offering me this position right now?"

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