

Network to Work Meeting

Resource Materials – February 2016

How to Answer 6 of the Most Common Interview Questions

You can expect to be asked a lot of questions during an interview. Some of the questions may be predictable; others may seem to come out of left field. Oftentimes it is easier to answer a question when you understand what it is being asked. Read on to find out the kinds of answers employers are really looking for.

Here are 6 of the Most Common Interview Questions:

1. "Tell Me About Yourself"

- **Here's what the employer wants to know:**

- *"How does your education, your work history, and your work goals relate to the job?"*
- Your answer gives insight into who you are, what you are all about, and what motivates you.
- Your answer also sets the stage for the interviewer to determine your truthfulness and consistency in the ways you answer later questions.

- **Here's how to answer:**

- Talk about specific, key work or educational experiences that demonstrate that you are a perfect fit for the job.
- For example: "I worked at ABC Company for x years. While there I did "x" (mention tasks that correspond to the job description). I really excelled at this work and greatly enjoyed doing it."

- **Here's an example, putting together the following:**

- (Tell a personal story that says who you are, why you chose a particular field, etc.)
 - "I went to ____ school and studied _____. I've been interested in _____ since I ____ (read or did or experienced something) _____.
- (Tell a professional story that highlights your experience and gives insight into the results this company would see from you if they hired you.)
 - In my career I have worked for _____, _____ and _____ (or worked doing _____, _____ and _____). Among my proudest moments in my career is _____.

- (Give a picture of yourself in the future.)
 - Moving forward I'm looking to continue working as a _____ in an environment where my knowledge and skills in _____ can be best utilized."

2. *"What is your Greatest Weakness?"*

- **Here's what the employer wants to know:**

- *"How well do you know yourself? Are you self-aware? Do you understand your areas that need improvement and are you working proactively on getting better?"*

- **Here's how to answer:**

- A good way to answer is with real-life feedback you have received in the past. Maybe a former boss told you that you get so focused on work that you forget to smile at customers.
- Then say what you've been doing to improve. For example: "I've been concentrating on smiling at each person who comes through the door, paying close attention to how they respond to my smile."
- DON'T give a "deal breaker" response such as "I don't like working with people".
- DON'T give cliché answers such as "I'm a perfectionist and I work too hard."

3. *"What Motivates you to Perform?"*

- **Here's what the employer wants to know:**

- *"Are you a hard worker or will I have to force you to produce quality work?"*
- Does your motivation come from within?

- **Here's how to answer:**

- Talk about how you find motivation in things like working toward a goal, contributing to a team effort, completing quality work, and/or developing your skills.
- Ideally, provide a specific example that demonstrates this.
- DON'T say you are motivated by bragging rights, material things or a fear of discipline.

4. *"Tell Me About a Time that you Failed?"*

- **Here's what the employer wants to know:**

- *"How do you respond to failure? Do you learn from your mistakes? Are you resilient?"*

- **Here's how to answer:**

- Give an example that shows how you turned a negative experience into a positive learning experience.
- Acknowledge one of your failures, take responsibility for it, and explain how you improved as a result.
- DON'T say you have never failed, don't blame someone else, and don't raise a deal breaker ("I once failed a drug test . . .").

5. *“Why Do You Want to Work Here?”*

- **Here’s what the employer wants to know:**
 - *“Are you genuinely interested in the job? Are you a good fit for the company?”*
- **Here’s how to answer:**
 - Your goal for this response is to demonstrate why you and the company are a great match in terms of philosophy and skill. Discuss what you’ve learned about them and how their mission, culture, and reputation resonate and matter to you.
 - You should add and highlight how the company would benefit professionally from you, and that you would benefit professionally from the job.

6. *“How Many Couches are there in America?”*

- **Here’s what the employer wants to know:**
 - *“Can you think on your feet, think critically, and handle pressure?”*
- **Here’s how to answer:**
 - DON’T be caught off guard by questions like this that seem absurd. Don’t comment on what a silly, stupid, or irrelevant question it is.
 - Showcase your problem-solving thought process! In this case you might talk about how many people there are in the U.S., the places you find couches, etc. It’s not about coming up with a right answer; rather, it’s about showing that you can think through a problem and come up with possible ways to solve it.

Adapted from:

“How to Answer 7 of the Most Common Interview Questions” by ZipRecruiter, found at:

<http://www.careerealism.com/most-common-interview-questions/>

“Here’s What you Say When An Interviewer Says, ‘Tell Me About Yourself’ by Michael Price, found at:

<http://www.careerealism.com/tell-me-about-yourself-interviewer/>