THE Q&A

Toughest Questions to Prepare for a Job Interview

With Natalie Fisher of www.asknataliefisher.com

HERE ARE THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES PEOPLE MAKE WHEN ANSWERING JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Over-explaining
- Lacking warmth
- Trying to be everything
- Winging it
- Failing to stand out
- Coming across as negative

ANSWERING THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

You can find lots of answers + examples to interview questions on my **YouTube channel**, where I've made a video about each one. If there's not a video there yet, it's in the making!

1 What is your biggest weakness?

- Tell me about a time you failed
- ...about a time you demonstrated leadership?
- ...about a time you had to make a tough judgment call?
- ...about a time you had to navigate an unhappy client?

2 How do you handle difficult coworkers?

- Turn it into an opportunity to talk about a "learning moment" in workplace
- Highlight your communication skills
- Do not discuss personalities or personal judgments

3 Where do you want to be five years from now?

The interviewer is assessing your expectations. Focus on the company.

- Your desire to grow with the company and the role
- Your desire to be challenged in the company and the role
- The alignment between your desires and the company's needs

4 Why do you want to work here?

- Focus on how you will serve them and how they will serve you.
- Research for this question will pay off because you can talk about their reputation in the field, the strength of their training programs, their financial success, etc.

5 Do you have a dream job?

- Don't be too literal.
- Focus on experiences, growth, and the challenges you want to take on.

6 Why are you leaving your job?

- The interviewer wants to hear you say that you're motivated by new challenges.
- Don't speak negatively about your current employer.
- Focus on gratitude for what you've learned.
- Prepare a response if you were laid off or fired.

7 What makes you unique?

- Focus on the traits that don't necessarily show through on your resume

For example:
One thing you can't see on my resume is how much pride I take in my work."

8 Why should we hire you?

- Focus on your background.
- Show examples of relevant problem-solving skills.
- Demonstrate the alignment between your abilities and their needs.
- Explain your connection to their mission.
- Avoid generic buzzwords like "team player".

PRACTICE: COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

One thing I cannot emphasize enough is that it's not always the answers you share, but the confidence, clarity and grace you say them with. For this reason, I recommend you interview yourself for the job. Ask these questions out loud, and provide your answers. Highlight the ones that you feel need work, and keep at them.

REMEMBER:

Never share a skill or accomplishment without an example or story to back it up.

ALSO, you do not need to memorize your responses here in the same way you would an elevator pitch. I recommend having 2-3 bullets that are brief for each answer so that your response is natural.

1. What are your strengths?
2. What are your weaknesses?
3. Why are you interested in working for [insert company name here]?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
5. Why do you want to leave your current company?
6. Why was there a gap in your employment between [insert date] and [insert date]?
7. What can you offer us that someone else can not?
8. What are three things your former manager would say about you?
9. Are you willing to relocate?
10. Are you willing to travel?

11. Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.
12. Tell me about a time you made a mistake.
13. What is your dream job?
14. How did you hear about this position?
15. What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/60 days/90 days on the job?
16. Walk me through your resume.
17. Discuss your educational background.
18. Describe yourself.
19. Tell me how you handled a difficult situation.
20. Why should we hire you?
21. Why are you looking for a new job?
22. Would you work holidays/weekends?
23. How would you deal with an angry or irate customer?
24. What are your salary requirements?
25. Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.

SOURCE: FORBES & GLASSDOOR

- Who are our competitors?
- What was your biggest failure?
- What motivates you?
- What's your availability?
- Who's your mentor?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.
- How do you handle pressure?
- What is the name of our CEO?
- What are your career goals?
- What gets you up in the morning?
- What would your direct reports say about you? What were your bosses' strengths/weaknesses?
- If I called your boss right now and asked him what is an area that you could improve on, what would he say?
- Are you a leader or a follower?
- What was the last book you've read for fun?
- What are your co-worker pet peeves?
- What are your hobbies?
- What is your favorite website?
- What makes you uncomfortable?
- What are some of your leadership experiences? How would you fire someone?
- What do you like the most and least about working in this industry?
- Would you work 40+ hours a week?
- What questions haven't I asked you?
- What questions do you have for me?

ANSWERS TO THE TOUGHEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1 "TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN... YOU FAILED."

This question is a situational question, like many will be. Whenever you hear this format of question—one that starts with "tell me about a time when..."--you'll want to have three points:

a. **What the situation was.**
b. **How you handled it.**
c. **What the result was.**

The most important thing about these answers is your energy. While your answer needs to be decent, it's really about how composed you are when you respond. You'll want to be brief in sharing the issue that took place and spend more time talking about the solution you came up with and how you're a better employee because of it.

A couple of other versions of this question may include:

- "Tell me about a time where you demonstrated leadership"
- "Tell me about a time where you had to make a tough judgment call."
- "Tell me about a time where you had to navigate an unhappy client."

The same structure applies to these questions: the situation, how it was handled, and the result. Remember, end on a positive note, and do not share any negativity. Share the story from a neutral energy.

2 "TELL ME HOW YOU HANDLED A DIFFICULT COWORKER."

This one is tough, so I wanted to give it a few minutes of our focus. It's no secret you never want to EVER, EVER, EVER even remotely talk smack in your interviews. So, if you get asked this question, you want to focus less on why the coworker was awful, and focus more, rather, on how you were concerned that some sort of behavior was blocking your success as a team in creating results. If you seem focused on results and any blocks that get in the way of those, you're seen less as drama and more as an achiever who is always focused on just getting things done.

Think about it:

Was there ever a coworker who was doing something that was leaving the company with less impactful results?

If so, answer it this way:

"There was a time when this one coworker would [insert behavior here]. I was concerned because it was obstructing our team's ability to deliver results. I spoke to her about [share details of the convo] and asked if I could do anything to help. I found that going to her directly got me much more respect than making a spectacle of it. What I learned from this interaction was [insert insights], so I am glad it took place. The company's mission was to [insert mission], and given the conversation we had, it was very helpful to bring us closer to that and the results we were hired to create."

2 "TELL ME HOW YOU HANDLED A DIFFICULT COWORKER."

Stay away from personality attacks or making judgments on people. Just focus on how a certain behavior hurt results, and that's why you discussed it.

For example, I personally once managed an employee who did not want to take on any projects that were tedious, and he preferred high responsibility. Doesn't everyone? As a manager, though, I know that results are created from the BIG jobs just as much as they're created from the small jobs. I was doing all these small tasks to pick up the slack, and finally I had to talk to him about it.

My answer, in the context of these steps, would be something like:

"There was a time when a coworker would show a bit of resistance towards doing more tedious jobs our client would send over. I liked him personally, but I was noticing that it wouldn't serve our client for me to take on these more time-consuming jobs as a manager, given that my focus was day-to-day client interaction and managing my team's quality output. I decided to speak with him privately and shared I was concerned that his opposition to these sorts of smaller jobs was hurting the team's performance, and I asked him what he thought I should do to help. What I learned from this interaction was the importance of more frequent communication. While he seemed a bit unhappy to take on the jobs, he told me it would help him to work from home more in order to get them done rather than staying late and hitting traffic. I was totally open to that, and ever since I authorized that, we have been really moving in alignment with our team's mission to provide detailed intelligence reports to the client. He is more willing than ever to pick up the slack!"

2 "TELL ME HOW YOU HANDLED A DIFFICULT COWORKER."

One thing I find really inspiring to talk to interviewers about when dealing with tough coworkers is the distinction between expectations and agreements. I think a lot of people in the workforce have expectations, but when you can talk about how you used tough coworker situations to come up with some clear, powerful agreements—rather than expectations—it's a fantastic distinction that usually makes a difference in the workplace. If you're looking for something insightful to talk about when dealing with tough coworkers as a topic, this is insightful.

Take my old colleague, for example. We came up with the agreement that he could work from home on days when tasks were more tedious. Instead of me just expecting him to get the work done, I communicated with him to come up with some powerful agreements.

3 "HOW MANY GOLF BALLS FIT IN AN AIRPLANE?"

One type of tough interview question is the ridiculous management consulting firm sort of questions, such as the ones asked at McKinsey. I once sat in one of these, and I was asked: "How many golf balls fit in an airplane?

So, the important thing to remember about these sorts of ridiculous analytical questions is that companies care less about your actual answer and more about your thought process. If you're in these sorts of high-level job interviews, all you need to do is truly share the process you'd go through in your mind to answer these sorts of ques ons.

My sense is you probably won't be in this ridiculousness, but if you are, all they want to know is how you think, not WHAT you think.

In this case, my first question was; "Is it a Boeing 747?" and from there, I started telling them I'd calculate the volume of the airplane, and I shared formulas to calculate volume. I'll spare you the rest of my answer, but you can see I ask questions and share my process in finding the answer.

I aced this answer, and it was because of my ability to stay calm and walk them through my thoughts. Again, let's all hope you never have to sit through one of these. Eesh!

4 WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

When you're asked this question, it basically just mans the interviewers want to know if this job has anything to do with what you want in your life and whether or not you'll be quitting in a year or so. They're gauging if you actually want this job and if it will serve you. They probably also are trying to feel into your expectations, and how "realistic" of a career you're looking to create.

First of all, never say "Ideally, I'll be in your job" or "I don't know where I'll be" or "I hope to be owning my own business..." This is not going to resonate for the employer.

There are 3 things they'll want to see when they ask you where you plan to be in five years:

a. **Desire to grow with the company.**
b. **Desire to be challenged in the company.**
c. **Alignment with your wants and the companies needs.**

So, in short, it's fair to say "I don't know where I'll be in five years, but given my desired career path is X, I would be really excited to move up the ladder in this company and have the opportunity to Y. I also really enjoy mentoring, so I'm hoping as I grow I can hope other employees do the same."

Never make it sound like a stepping-stone — even if it is.

5 WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?

This is about two things: how you'll serve them, and how they'll serve you. Make sure you find a sweet spot on how this company can help you live your purpose and how you can help it live up to its mission.

Perhaps let them know you researched them, and you believe the company is the best of the best. Back this up, perhaps with their reputation, their financial success, their ranking among top places to work, how they train their employees, etc. Importantly, you need to be familiar with their products and services, and tell the hiring manager why you feel that these products or services are the best out there.

6 DO YOU HAVE A DREAM JOB?

If you're asked this question, know you don't need to answer by naming a specific job, but rather just focus on what kinds of experiences, growth and challenges you'd like to take on.

Here's an example of a simple, good answer:

"In my ideal job, I would love to always be growing and challenged, and ideally I'd be using my personality to interface with clients. I absolutely love connecting with people, and I hope for a company that leverages that about me at all times."

You get what this looks like. Don't share a specific job.

7 WHY ARE YOU LEAVING YOUR JOB?

Interviewers will try to see if you're motivated by money or a challenge. Obviously, they want to hear that you're motivated by a challenge. They'll want to grasp what motivates you to leave a company. Needless to say, never go negative, and never talk smack.

I'd share the following sort of response:

a. **What you're grateful for having learned**
b. **When you realized it was me for your next growth opportunity**
c. **How you're excited for your next challenge**
d. **Why this company you're interviewing with fits the bill for that**

If you're simply leaving for the sake of growth, a great answer sounds like this:

"I am so grateful for all the growth I got in this role... [Then share a few lines about all the greatness.] I realized it was me for me to move on when I felt my skills were no longer being challenged and I felt I had learned all that I could. I loved the company, but there wasn't room for my growth, and that is what inspired me to move on. Your company and this role provides exactly the growth I am yearning for [explain why]... Needless to say, I plan on staying in touch with everyone there when the me comes!"

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If you got laid off:

"The company restructured, and while it was so unfortunate to see so many of my colleagues laid off, I am grateful it gave me an opportunity recalibrate and really center myself on my most authentic next steps. That is what let to decide to apply here. [Explain what makes them unique and great for you.]"

If you got fired:

In this case, I'd research your city or state/province laws to see if employers are able to find out if you were terminated. In some states, potential employers can call your past employer and get some insights on you. In other states, this is not permitted and they can only confirm your dates of employment—NOT if you got fired. First, know this.

If they CAN find out you got fired, here is the answer:

"Unfortunately, I was let go. I understood their reasoning, and I'm very clear on the areas that needed improvement. I believe I'm absolutely a better employee because of it [INSERT WHY & ACTION STEPS YOU TOOK TO GROW—hiring a coach, taking classes, etc.]."

8 WHAT MAKES YOU UNIQUE?

This is a great place to share what kind person you are and how that shows up in the workplace. One thing a company cannot buy is an employee who cares and executes without follow up. Share what kind of person you are, and give an example for how that'll show up in the company. I love starting with "one thing you cannot see on my resume is..."

Whenever I got this question, I'd say:

"One thing you can't see on my resume is how much pride I take in my work. I'm the sort of employee who treats a company as though it is my own because I find that my work is more rewarding when I do. I always go the extra mile with clients, be it a thank-you card or marking my calendar to know their birthday. I think this is what makes a company stand out."

Another powerful thing to do here, if you choose, is to give an example of a time that you solved a really big problem. Use that example as a way to open the door to sharing the kind of employee you truly are.

9 WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?

It's always good to tell them how excited you are to take on responsibility and take work from other people's plates—the more you can grow, the better, right? Make it clear you're a contributor.

Here's how to answer this:

a. **Focus on your background.**
b. **Share examples of relevant problems you've solved.**
c. **Share how your abili es align with the company's needs.**
d. **Share why you're enthusiastic about them and how connected you feel to their mission.**

Steer clear of terms like "team player" and all those other trite buzzwords. They've been through too many interviews with those, and their eyes will glaze over.

10 HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE POSITION?

Use this to show them how much you researched them and how connected you feel to them as a company. Most people would just say they found the job posting, but it's more impactful when the company feels like you've had your eye on them for a while.

11 WHAT ARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL STRENGTHS?

Share your strengths, and back them up with examples and at least 1 story!

12 WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT?

Share the following:

1. **A situation or task you had to complete and how you handled it.**
2. **The BIG results.**

13 WHAT OTHER COMPANIES ARE YOU INTERVIEWING WITH?

In this question, you're simply being sniffed out. I would make it more about the skills than the companies. I'd say, "I'm exploring a number of similar options in the industry, but what makes you compelling in particular is X." And you can continue to say, "Any company that allows me to XYZ is what I'm focused on," and through that, share more skills you're honing in on.

13 WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN A NEW POSITION?

Share something that lines up with the role very clearly.

13 WHAT TYPE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT DO YOU PREFER?

Share something that lines up with the role very clearly.

15 WHAT IS YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE?

Be honest, although it helps to focus on how you understand that your team's results are a reflection of how they're being managed. You're aggressive with your goals, but very focused on caring for your team.

16 HOW WOULD YOUR COWORKERS DESCRIBE YOU?

This is where you want to know your key strengths and share examples to back them up.

17 WHY DID YOU CHANGE CAREER PATHS?

This is where you say, "I'm so grateful my past path allowed me to hone in on growing in XY areas, but one thing that was missing for me was Z... And that's why I'm so excited to be in this conversation with you about this role."

18 HOW DO YOU HANDLE STRESS?

Share what action steps you take when there's pressure in the workplace. For example, do you create a big to-do list? Share your tactics to manage the workload, and if you enjoy stress (some people do!), share that.

19 WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY REQUIREMENTS?

"I'm negotiable depending on the range for the position. My first priority is finding the right fit."

If they push, make sure you've done your research, and let them know "I'm being considered for similar roles at a range of $- $." You'll want to use the top third of salary ranges you and on sites like Glassdoor or PayScale.com.

20 HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME OUTSIDE OF WORK?

This is where they're trying to get a feel for what sort of person you are and whether you'll jive with other employee personalities in the company. Just be honest about what you enjoy!

21 WHAT DO YOU THINK OUR COMPANY COULD IMPROVE ON OR DO DIFFERENTLY?

Don't offend them, but show them you can think critically about the company and what it's missing. They'll want to see that you have ideas for them. Make sure the recommendations you make align with the job or team you're interviewing for.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER ASKING

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Below is a list of interview questions to consider asking either during or at the end of your interview.

1. What does success look like in this position?
2. What would you say are the key challenges that the person in this role would be facing?
3. What are the qualities of a person who you see excelling in this role?
4. What is the employee culture like here?
5. What do you enjoy the most and the least about working here?
6. What does a day in the life look like in this position?
7. How do you see this sort of position evolving over me?
8. Do you have any reservations about my qualifications?
9. How has this role evolved since it was created?
10. What is the top priority for this position over the next three months?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO NEVER ASK

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First of all, never ask anything that you could have gured out on a quick Google search. It shows the company you didn't do your due diligence, and they'll assume you're that sort of employee.

1. **How much do you pay?**

   This is like asking marriage on the first date.

2. **How much time off do you offer?**

   You want them to be focused on what you'll give to them, not the paid vacation me you will take from them...

3. **What's your company mission? What does your company do?**

   You should know this!

4. **Are employees able to work on their own schedule?**

   Don't let them assume you're going to be a diva!

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO NEVER ASK

5 **What are the benefits in this position?**

Don't let them assume you're going to be a diva!

6 **Do you do background checks?**

7 **Do you monitor employee internet use?**

Now they're worried...

8 **How quickly to people get promoted in this role?**

They want someone who wants the actual job.

9 **Do you pay for relocation costs?**

You're already making them see money coming out of their pocket! Don't cover this until you have a job offer.

9 **I'm actually even more interested in your marketing team—how long until I can be considered for those roles?**

They want someone excited about the job they're interviewing for, not someone who clearly sees it as a stepping stone (Although, let's be honest--everything is a stepping stone!)

TOPICS TO AVOID

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- Avoid too many questions about the interviewer's background or personal life.
- Avoid politics, unless you're interviewing in the government!
- Avoid letting them know you're not local (if you're job hunting long distance!) unless it comes up. No need to divulge!
- Avoid letting them know if it's taken you a LONG time to get a job. No need to show them you're not a "desired" job seeker.
- Avoid letting them know if you hated any of your jobs—makes you look negative.
- Avoid sharing any entrepreneurial aspirations, as they'll feel like they're just a layover in your higher career plan.
- Avoid sharing information on difficult coworkers unless you're asked.
- Avoid mentioning gossip or rumors you've heard about the company.

ITEMS TO IMPROVE

What are five questions or scenarios you wish went better in your last job interview?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How can you improve upon them?

POST-INTERVIEW "THANK YOU" NOTE

Hi [interviewer name],

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. It was such a pleasure to learn more about the team and position, and I'm very excited about the opportunity to join [company name] and help [bring in new clients/develop world-class content/ anything else awesome you would be doing] with your team.

I look forward to hearing from you about the next steps in the hiring process, and please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information.

Best regards, [Your name]

JOB INTERVIEW: FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Follow Up Email

Hi NAME,

I hope all is well with the hiring process... I just wanted to follow up on the status of my candidacy for the [INSERT POSITION] vacancy I interviewed for on [DATE OF INTERVIEW]. I remain very interested in the opportunity.

Thanks for your consideration!

Warmly, NAME

REJECTION FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

Hi NAME,

Thanks so much for taking the me to let me know the outcome of your search— I am so glad that you found a candidate that suits your needs!

I would love to hear from you in the event that another opportunity presents itself, as I thoroughly appreciated your me and enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about [COMPANY] and the people you work with.

I resonated with your mission to [MISSION] and I believe your need for employees who have [YOUR SKILL THEY NEED] skills make us such a great mutual fit!

Best wishes, NAME