

Presents

## HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

(June 2020)

*"Believing in yourself is the starting point. Effectively communicating your abilities to others is the necessity." - Robin Ryan, career coach and best-selling author*

To get any job, you'll have to **get an interview first, get through the interview successfully, and get the job offer from the employer.**

Whether or not you get a job offer is almost entirely up to you – **the time and effort that you spend with your interview preparation makes a big difference in getting a successful outcome from your job interview.**

### JOB INTERVIEW PREPARATION INCLUDES:

- Doing **RESEARCH** on yourself (and your background), the job(s) you want and the company where you want to work – **you have to connect the dots for the employer** so they'll know that you're going to be a good fit for them and the job
- Submitting an application that's completed *according to the application's directions*
- Submitting a resume that shows the evidence which proves (a) **you understand what it takes to do the job you're asking for**, and (b) you have the **necessary job skills and track record of success (career accomplishments) that show you are the best person for the job**
- **USING YOUR TIME WISELY** by making the final preparations before your interview:
  - Taking detailed notes about the interview date, time, and location, and determine what you'll need to bring with you (work samples, extra resumes / references / letters of recommendation, etc.)
  - **Getting the right clothing ready for the interview**, based on the job and the work environment
  - **Determining the questions** that you're likely to be asked by the interviewer, and **preparing your answers** to those questions
  - **Practicing your answers** in a mock interview of some kind, before the day of your interview
  - **Driving the route to the interview site** to determine the fastest way to get there and where you'll park, before the day of your interview
  - If necessary, **getting your hair cut, manicure / pedicure, buying an interview outfit, shining your shoes, etc.**, before the day of your interview
  - **Cleaning out your car** before the day of your interview (it's common for employers to send employees to look inside your car to see how tidy and organized *(or messy)* you are)
- Things you should be doing the night before your interview:
  - **Going over questions and answers a few more times**
  - **Getting your clothes ready**
  - **Getting a good night's sleep (6 to 8 hours)**

- Things you should do the day of your interview:
  - **Eat breakfast, but not too much**
  - **Don't take more than a portfolio or briefcase with you (ladies can also take a purse)**, so that you're not juggling a lot of items during your interview
  - **Don't carry a lot of change in your pockets**
  - **Leave early enough to get to the interview site at least 10-20 minutes before your interview starts**
  - **Lock up your cell phone in your glove box** – if you must take your cell phone with you, **you must turn it completely off** (setting it to silent or vibrate isn't good enough)
  - **Say hello and introduce yourself** to the front desk / secretary / receptionist when you arrive, and offer a firm handshake, good eye contact and a smile
  - **Excuse yourself to visit the restroom after you've introduced yourself**, and take care of business (*don't forget to spit out your chewing gum*)
  - When you're called back to start your interview, **introduce yourself to the interviewer(s)** and offer a firm handshake, good eye contact and a smile
  - **Wait to be offered a seat** before you sit down
  - Politely decline any offers of a **drink, something to eat, or the opportunity to use tobacco** (even if the interviewer is doing some/all of those activities)
  - **Sit up straight in your chair** with your feet flat on the floor and your hands folded over your lap – put your briefcase/portfolio and/or purse on the floor, next to your feet
  - **Don't swear or talk about potentially offensive subjects**, even if your interviewer is doing so (definitely stay clear of political or religious discussions of any kind)
  - **Speak clearly** when you answer questions, and look the interviewer in the eye
  - **If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to clarify or restate the question**

## **ANSWERING QUESTIONS**

Many things play a part in having a successful interview (body language, eye contact, your appearance, your handshake, etc.), but your answers to questions still play a significant part as well.

As stated earlier, you should try to determine the questions that the interviewer(s) will ask – you can even contact the employer to see if they share interview questions with candidates. If the employer doesn't do that, then it will be up to you to figure it out.

**Some of the questions that you'll get will be based on the information found in your application and resume**, so you should carefully review those documents several times before your interview.

**Other questions will be based on the kind of job or industry that you're pursuing.** You can find web sites dedicated to job or industry-specific interview questions (Google "customer service interview questions", for example).

**Often the "icebreaker" questions at the beginning of your interview will be fairly traditional**, including the following five questions:

1. **"Tell me about yourself."** Best answer: short and concise, giving general highlights from your background that show you should get the job.
2. **"What do you know about our company?"**

3. “**Why do you want to work for our company?**” Questions 2 and 3 demonstrate the importance of **researching the job and company** – most employers want to hire people that know what a company does and know how to help the company make money and solve problems. **Best answers:** do your homework, research the job and company (spend time learning about the company at their web site, and click “About Us”) and connect the dots between **your background** and **what the company wants to get when they hire someone**.
4. “**What is your greatest strength?**”
5. “**What is your biggest weakness?**” Questions 4 and 5 can easily trip up candidates – you should prepare answers that effectively sell you and your background for the job while being honest about what you’ve had to do (and what you can still do now) to become a better employee. **Best answer for a strength:** Something that’s impressive in your career that will benefit the employer (a skill or qualification that is necessary for the job). **Best answer for a weakness:** something challenging in your background that you’ve successfully dealt with – something that you’ve corrected and learned from in your career, or something that you’re currently working on to improve or correct.

**For the most part, the interviews that you’ll get will probably be BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS.** This means that you’ll answer questions about things you’ve done in your past jobs that will show what kind of an employee you’ll be if the interviewer gives you the job you’re asking for. In other words, your past successful behaviors on jobs will indicate the kind of successful behaviors you’ll engage in when you get hired.

Most behavioral interview questions require answers that demonstrate **positive qualities** about you and your abilities – you did something for a former employer that **made money for the company / saved money for the company / saved time on your job / solved a problem** on your job – but you’ll sometimes have to answer behavioral questions about the **negative aspects** of your background and career.

**The three types of behavioral interview questions are:**

**SPECIFIC REQUESTS:** “Tell me about a time when something you learned on a past job helped you to do better on a later job.”

**HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS:** “If we made you a team leader on a project, how would you determine your day-to-day priorities for that project?”

**FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:** “When you’ve managed multiple projects on past jobs, did you feel a lot of stress? What did you do to manage your stress on the job? In hindsight, is there anything that you would do differently today? etc.”

**The way to create the best answers for almost all behavioral interview questions is the STAR format:**

“**S**” – your answer will begin by describing a **SITUATION** on one of your past jobs, or

“**T**” – your answer will begin by describing a **TASK** you had to perform on a past job

“**A**” – your answer will then describe the **ACTION(S)** that you took with that situation or task, and

“**R**” – your answer concludes with the **RESULT(S)** of your actions in that situation or task (providing the details of either the positive or negative results of your actions)

## A SAMPLING OF COMMON BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*(Try to match the following questions to THE JOB YOU WANT AT THE COMPANY WHERE YOU'D LIKE TO WORK)*

1. Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.
2. Give an example of how you applied knowledge from previous work experience to a project in another job.
3. Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
4. Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your supervisor's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
5. Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing their share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague? Did you agree or disagree with the manager's actions?
6. Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
7. Describe a successful team effort. What was the situation, who was on the team, how did you work together, what was the purpose/structure of the team? Did you run into any obstacles, what actions did you take, and what were the results?
8. We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example (or examples) of how you have done this.
9. In a supervisory or group leader role, have you ever had to discipline or counsel an employee or group member? What was the nature of the discipline? What steps did you take? How did that make you feel? How did you prepare yourself?
10. Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?
11. Tell of some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?
12. Tell me about a situation where you had to adjust quickly to shifts in priorities. What was the issue, what did you do and what was the outcome?
13. Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
14. Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
15. Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
16. Give me an example of when you have volunteered to lead a difficult or challenging project, describing the project, what you did, what surprised you, what obstacles you had to overcome, how it all turned out and what you learned.
17. Give me an example of when you provided a particularly innovative solution to an issue the organization was facing. Describe the issue, your innovative solution, how it was different from previous approaches, how it all turned out and what you learned.
18. Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you proceed?
19. Give an example or examples of things that you've learned on your own outside of any formal schooling or job training that you've completed.
20. How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.
21. Describe a time in your career when you had many projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?
22. Describe when you (or a group that you were a part of) were in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do?
23. Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle (either an internal or external customer, or both) – perhaps an angry or irate customer. Be specific and tell what you did and what the outcome was.

24. Describe a situation when your contribution led to particularly good customer service. What was the situation, what did you do, why, and what were the results?
25. Describe a situation where you had to address not meeting customer objectives. What was the situation, who was involved, what did you do, and what were the results?
26. Tell me about a time when you or your unit was complimented for helping a customer beyond the call of duty. What was the situation, what did you do, why did you do this, what feedback did you receive, and how frequently do you go to that kind of effort?
27. Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
28. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. What did you need to know before making the decision? How did it turn out? Would your decision prove to have been different if time was not an issue? If so, how?
29. What kind of decisions do you make rapidly? What kind takes more time? How do you determine which approach is appropriate in a situation? Give examples.
30. Describe a process improvement you've implemented. What was the improvement? What actions did you take? What results did you expect? What results did you get?
31. In your view, what are the most important aspects of delegating assignments to individuals? When and how do you decide what to delegate to whom? What works really well, and what has been disappointing? Describe a specific example, what the situation was, what you did and what the results were.
32. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an individual who was not meeting expectations. How did you approach it? How did the person respond? What actions did you take? How did you follow up?
33. Tell me about the last occasion in which you faced a problem with delegated responsibilities not being performed. What was the nature of the problem? How did you discover the non-performance of the responsibilities? What action did you take? How successful was the result?
34. Tell me about a recent situation that required immediate action. What did you do and why did you do it this way? What were the results?
35. Describe a specific effort you took to foster and manage diversity, what you did, how people reacted, and what were the results.
36. Describe a situation in which you have had to mediate between two disputing parties. What was the situation? Why were the parties in dispute? What did you do? What were the results?
37. Describe a time that you have had personal conflict with another person. What was the situation? What did you do? Was there an emotional reaction to cope with? How did you cope with this? What were the results?

### **PROBING OR FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS THAT YOU CAN ALSO EXPECT**

- What steps did you take?
- What action did you take?
- What happened after that?
- What did you say?
- How did he/she react?
- How did you handle that?
- What was your reaction?
- How do you feel about that?
- What was the outcome?
- Were you happy with the outcome/result?
- What did you wish you had done differently?
- What did you learn from that?
- How did you resolve that?
- What was the outcome of that?
- Why did you decide to do that?
- What was your logic?
- What was your reasoning?
- Who do you think was at fault?
- Where were you when this happened?
- Who else was involved?
- What time was it?
- How did you prepare for that?
- What was your role?
- What obstacles did you face?
- What were you thinking at that point?
- Lead me through your decision-making process
- Tell me more about your interaction with that person.
- Why?
- How?
- When?
- Where?
- What?

## 20 COMMON QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED DURING TRADITIONAL INTERVIEWS (AND SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO ANSWER)

*(Adapted from 60 Seconds & You're Hired! (Expanded Edition) by Robin Ryan; The Ultimate Job Search – Job Seeker's Workbook; US Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service)*

- 1. What do you know about our company?** Instead of spending a long time rattling off information you found from their web site, use a **“60 Second Sell”** to sum up how you would meet the employer's needs for the job. A 60 Second Sell is just your top selling points (relevant skills/training/accomplishments) organized into a short, concise answer that lasts about a minute – usually it'll cover your top five selling points that relate to the question.
- 2. What qualifications do you have for this job?** Your 60 Second Sell would be your best bet for this answer.
- 3. What is your greatest strength?** Use your 60 Second Sell technique, and tailor your response to the needs of the employer.
- 4. What is your greatest weakness?** Focus on something that won't adversely affect your chances of being hired by the employer (example: “I'm really great at using the entire Microsoft Office software package, but I might find your company's data entry program a little challenging – I might need to work harder outside of regular work hours to get up to speed in the shortest possible time.”). Upgrading computer skills / improving multi-tasking capabilities might be the safest bets to discuss here.
- 5. Tell me about yourself.** Again, your 60 Second Sell should do the trick for this question. Focus on relating what you have to offer to meet the employer's needs.
- 6. Why did you leave your previous job?** Expect this question. Acceptable answers include those focusing on better opportunities for growth; relocation; downsized/laid off; reorganization which affected your job duties. Be positive.
- 7. Have you ever been asked to resign?** The answer should always be “No” – you were either fired, laid off, or you ultimately made the choice to quit (no matter what the circumstances of your voluntary separation may have been).
- 8. I'm concerned about your lack of...** If the interviewer is unaware of your experience, bring up an example that shows your abilities and your willingness to adapt and learn new things as needed. Show that you're willing to do what it takes to get up to speed in the shortest time possible.
- 9. You seem to have a lot of experience – why would you want this job?** Don't oversell your abilities – the interviewer may think you're overqualified or that you're more talented than they are. Don't ever sound desperate to take any job – briefly explain why this job suits you at this time (less time away from your family; a need for more structure, etc.). At the same time, remember to also stress your enthusiasm in remaining a productive worker who can still play an important part in the organization – you don't want to give the impression that you're ready to mark time and do as little as possible until it's time for retirement.
- 10. Give me an example of how you handled dealing with a difficult co-worker.** Don't send up “red flags” with your answer to this question – they want to know if you're a troublemaker, or into things like turf wars. It's best to approach your answer from the standpoint of being a “team player”: open to compromise; talking openly, objectively, and in a mature manner about problem areas; working with others and asking for their input to find solutions; etc.
- 11. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?** Select two or three of your top selling points that are essential to doing the employer's job successfully.
- 12. Tell me about your education.** Focus on the parts of your major, and the subjects you studied, that apply the most to what the employer will need from you if you're hired.
- 13. Will occasionally working late at night cause any problems for you at home?** You should hopefully know from research if your employer would expect this from you. Assure the employer that you are reliable, dependable, and you're willing to work the hours required to get the job done.
- 14. Describe your best/worst boss. Best boss:** they're really asking, “Can you work with me?” – frame your answer accordingly by focusing on the management style that enables you to be the most productive on the job. **Worst boss:** don't be negative about a former boss in any way. Frame your answer as positively as possible and connect your answer to what will make you accomplish the most

at work (example: “One boss I had didn’t give me enough feedback, and regular feedback about my job performance really helps me to stay focused on how to do the best job possible.”).

**15. What are you doing now to improve yourself?** Your answer should demonstrate your willingness to be a lifelong learner, especially when it means you’re improving skills that will help you to do a better job meeting your employer’s needs.

**16. How do others describe you?** Fall back on your 5 Point Agenda for this - mention three or four points that others would deem the most important items required to do the employer’s job. If your boss or others would be willing to vouch for you as references, give the employer the option to contact them.

**17. What do you consider your most noteworthy accomplishments in your last job?** Review your 60 Second Sell and your 5 Point Agenda – write down three work-related accomplishments that prove you will meet the employer’s needs and are able to perform the employer’s job. Examples from community or association work can also provide appropriate responses. Stay away from personal accomplishments such as “I’ve lost 35 pounds” (and especially steer clear of extremely personal accomplishments like “I’ve been clean and sober and haven’t had a drink or any drugs for seven months.”).

**18. What is a personal goal that you still want to achieve?** Mention a goal that would increase your value as worker for that employer.

**19. How does this position fit into your future plans?** The interviewer wants to find out if you’re worth the risk of hiring (and the cost of training) you to do the job – will you stick around, or will you take off in the near future? Your answer needs to show flexibility, adaptability, and a realistic, wise attitude towards your future opportunities.

**20. What could you have done better on your last job?** Be very careful – this could destroy your chances of getting the job, depending on how you answer. Focus on something where you seized an opportunity to not only correct a behavior but also learn from your mistake – answering in a way that shows you can handle constructive criticism isn’t a bad way to go, either. Stay away from “red flag” behaviors, such as tardiness, excessive absences, conflicts with co-workers, etc.

## **DON’T FORGET: YOU’LL BE EXPECTED TO ASK QUESTIONS OF YOUR OWN**

(Adapted from 60 Seconds & You’re Hired! (Expanded Edition) by Robin Ryan)

You’ll probably get the opportunity to ask the employer some questions of your own, so the questions you decide to ask (and the answers you get) will help you decide if you really want the job and if it will be a good fit for everyone concerned.

Interviewers often make judgments about you based on the questions you ask, so keep your questions job-related and duty-related. Ask appropriate questions – since the interviewer may not have the detailed, technical knowledge that the company expert may know, keep your questions focused on the general ideas about the job duties.

Your chance to ask questions will likely be at the end of the interview, before you shake hands with them and leave. When it’s your turn to ask questions, stay focused on the job, its duties, and opportunities for growth at the company. You should assume that you will get no more than five or ten minutes to ask your questions – make it count.

Finally, under no circumstances should you ask any questions about salary or benefits. You’ll give the wrong impression to the interviewer, because they’ll likely think that you’re over-confident or you’re assuming that the job’s in the bag and yours for the asking. **Ask questions about salary and benefits ONLY AFTER YOU’RE GIVEN THE JOB OFFER.**

1. What are the day-to-day responsibilities that I’ll have in this job?
2. Whom will I be supervising?
3. Could you explain your organizational structure to me?
4. What is the organization’s plan for the next five years, and how does this department or division fit in?

5. Will we be expanding, bringing on any new products or new services that I should be aware of?
6. Could you describe to me your typical management style and the type of employee that works well with you?
7. What are some of the skills and abilities you see as necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
8. What challenges might I encounter if I take on this position?
9. What are your major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?
10. What are the areas in the job that you'd like to see improved?
11. What is your company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so the employees can keep up on their skills or acquire new skills?
12. What is the budget this department operates with?
13. Are there any restraints or cutbacks planned that would decrease those budgets?
14. What particular computer equipment and software do you use here? When was your last upgrade?
15. Are any new equipment purchases planned?
16. What personality traits do you think are necessary to succeed in this job?
17. Will I be working as part of a team or alone?
18. What committees will I participate in?
19. How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
20. To what extent are the functions of this department considered important by upper management?
21. Are there any weaknesses in the department that you are working to improve?
22. What are the company's long-term goals?
23. What are the department's goals and how do they fit into the company's mission?
24. What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
25. How does the reporting structure work here? What are acceptable channels of communication?
26. What new endeavors is the company currently undertaking?
27. What goals or objectives need to be achieved in the next six months? Next year?
28. What areas of the job would you like to see improvement in with regard to the person who was most recently performing these duties?
29. Describe the atmosphere of the office. (You are looking for clues on pressure and stress level with this question).
30. What types of people seem to excel here?
31. Is the company quick or slow to adapt to new technology?
32. Can you give me an idea of the typical workload and extra hours or special needs it demands?
33. Where is the person who previously held this job? (If fired, ask why; if promoted, where did he or she go; if at a new job, get a better idea of why it was created – depending on how your interview is going, you might be careful about how you phrase this question.)
34. How does the company promote personal and professional growth?
35. How would you describe the corporate structure here?

### **WHEN THE INTERVIEW IS OVER...**

- **Ask for the job before you leave**, if you still want it (ask if you can call in a week for an update)
- **Do not ask for a job if you don't want it after all**
- **Send the employer a thank note ASAP** (stationary/note card (using legible handwriting) or email) to thank them for their time and remind them again about why you should get the job
- **Keep looking for new job opportunities**

## **IT ALL COMES DOWN TO HOW YOU'D ANSWER THE QUESTION BEHIND EVERY INTERVIEW QUESTION YOU'LL EVER GET:**

*Why should the employer hire you?*