

Twenty Questions You Should Know How to Answer

The interview process is an opportunity to discuss what you are all about. You need to be very cognizant of who you are, what you want to do with your career, what your career goals are, what your abilities and limitations are. You need to be prepared and you need to be rehearsed so that the answer to any question can roll out with confidence.

The interview is also a time to find out and determine if the company and the opportunity are compatible with who you are and what you want. Portray yourself honestly and accurately and you will have a successful day with your potential new employer.

During your face-to-face interviews, you will be asked many questions, only a fraction of which will focus on your qualifications in a direct, objective way. Some or all of the following questions, whatever the wording, are likely to be asked in an effort to understand more about you. These questions are probably the hardest “chemistry” questions you will encounter.

Remember, not every interviewer will be skilled in the art, and they may be as nervous as you. You are not on trial, so relax and help to make the interview a mutually pleasant process.

1. Tell me about yourself? I would love to, where would you like me to begin?

Most often, this is an early, warm-up question. Answer briefly (at most two minutes), covering education, work history, and recent career. Don't waste your best points at this stage, but you can hint at them.

2. What do you know about our organization?

Know something, but not everything. If possible, mention something new (product, advertisement, expansion, etc.) Show interest.

3. Why do you want to work for us?

See question 2; linked answer. If they are doing something new, stress wanting to be part of a team going places. Your answer should show that you know something about the company and why you are considering the opportunity.

4. What can you do for us that someone else can't?

You are not someone else so you can have no idea of what they can do for the company. This question is an open invitation to sell yourself. Cite examples, use action words, and help them understand that you are the right person for their opportunity. Quantitate your achievements and accomplishments as much as possible.

5. What do you find most attractive about this position? Least attractive?

Mention three or four positives (opportunity for personal growth, exercise creativity, cultural environment, etc.). The benefits program may be good, but you will lose points by stressing them here. A minor program might be mentioned (I like to ski, and now I'll have to travel a bit further).

6. Why should we hire you?

Your ability, your experience, your energy – see questions 2 and 4 for framework.

7. What do you look for in a job?

This is the flip side of 6 – you want to be able to use your ability and energy in a growth situation.

8. Define the position for which you are being interviewed.

Be brief, stressing responsibilities. If you do not fully understand the position, say so and ask for more particulars. Say that based on what was explained to you up to now, it sounded interesting, but one of your objectives in the interview was to develop a very clear idea of the position in all its important details (note: If you get to the third or fourth person in the interview process, and you don't know what the job entails, don't worry, you'll never get it!) Note: BE very careful in your answer to any question about your level of interest in a "possibly different" position; the interviewer may be testing whether you are simply looking for a job, or are focused clearly on the opportunity that attracted you to the interview and the company.

9. How long will it be before you make a contribution?

Be realistic. A salesperson sells from day one, and an engineer should be an engineer from day one: short-term, you will pull your weight, but after six months or so you should start making more major contributions.

10. Are you a good manager (supervisor)? Do you have upper management potential?

Cite one or two examples. If you are in the early stages of your career, talk about traits in role models that you are trying to emulate.

11. What do you look for when you hire?

Skills, initiative, energy, compatibility. If you haven't hired yet, you will, and the foregoing is what is important to you. All of the above should be tied into achievements and accomplishments of the individual.

12. What is the most difficult thing about being a manager (supervisor)?

To plan and execute something worthwhile on time and within budget through motivation and management of yourself and others.

13. What important trends do you see in our industry?

The more experience you have, the more likely the question. Answers could be along technological, economic, regulatory, societal lines.

14. Why are you leaving your current job?

Be positive. Stress opportunity and growth related reasons. Don't talk about money; don't belittle your present employer.

15. How do you feel about leaving your accumulated old benefits?

You're opportunity driven, not security focused.

16. What do you like best about your current job? Least?

Be careful and positive. Like more things than you dislike. One of the dislikes could be lack of opportunity, new product dearth, etc. Don't characterize your soon-to-be-old company as rotten.

17. What do you think of your present boss?

Be positive about he/she. Potential employers do not take kindly to hatchet-wielders. Also, be brief and get off the subject.

18. What do you feel is the right salary for this job? What will it take for you to accept this job?

The best way to answer the question of salary is NOT to answer it. By throwing a dollar figure out you will do one of two things. #1 You will underprice yourself and have to live with a lower offer than you could have received. Or #2 You will overprice yourself and not receive an offer based on too high a salary or unrealistic expectations.

The best way to answer the salary question is

(Mr. Employer) the primary reason I am here today is the opportunity at (Company XYZ) and I do envision an opportunity. What I would like to say is that at the end of our meeting if you have an interest in me I would like to entertain your strongest offer.

Recognize at this point you are sending a powerful message. You are telling that employer you are interested in one and only one offer – Their strongest or very best offer.

You place the company in a position of making their strongest offer and you place yourself in a position of gracefully turning that offer down if it is not acceptable.

Here are other responses to the question of salary.

If you are unable to duck a direct answer, reply that you currently make XXXX and that the opportunity you are there to learn about should command some premium that is consistent with it.

Your best answer is that you are trying to learn about the opportunity now, not what it pays. You need some quiet time to think after the interview sessions so that you can fully understand the opportunity in both the short and long-term.

19. What are your long-range goals?

Don't talk about too many, and sprinkle in a clearly realistic short-term goal or two. Stick to professional goals, unless specifically asked for others.

20. How successful do you think you have been so far?

Present a positive and confident picture of yourself – don't exaggerate. Quantitate whenever possible and answer in terms of achievements and accomplishments.

As with all generalities, there will be exceptional answers. If all else fails, be consistent. If interrupted during the interview, do not be afraid to prompt about where the process left off; after all, you have had more time to think about the answers. If more than one interviewer asks the same question, and you felt good about your answer, credit him for asking a good question, and answer it again.