

Interview Practice Questions

Job Team Breakout Sessions April 26, 2009

These questions and answers are from the ultimate job seeker's resource, the book, Knock 'Em Dead, Great Answers to over 200 Tough Interview Questions –Plus the latest electronic job search strategies by Martin Yate

1. **What is the most difficult situation you have faced?**

The question looks for information on two fronts: How do you define difficult? And, what was your handling of the situation? You must have a story ready for this one in which the situation both was tough and allowed you to show yourself in a good light. Avoid talking about problems that have to do with coworkers. You can talk about the difficult decision to fire someone, but emphasize that once you had examined the problem and reached a conclusion you acted quickly and professionally with the best interests of the company at heart.

2. **Describe a difficult problem you've had to deal with.**

This is a favorite tough question. It is not so much the difficult problem that's important – it's the approach you take to solving problems in general. IT is designed to probe your professional profile; specially, your analytical skills.

"Well, I always follow a five-step format with a difficult problem. One, I stand back and examine the problem. Two, I recognize the problem as the symptom of another, perhaps hidden, factors. Three, I make a list of possible solutions to the problems. Four, I weigh both the consequences and cost of each solution, and determine the best solution. And five, I go to my boss, outline the problem, make my recommendation and ask for my superior's advice and approval.

Then, give an example of a problem and your solution. There is a thorough example: "When I joined my present company, I filled the shoes of a manager who had been fired. Turnover was very high. My job was to reduce turnover and increase performance. Sales of our new copier had slumped for the fourth quarter in a row, partially due to ineffective customer service. The new employer was very concerned, and he even gave me permission to clean house. The cause of the problem? The customer-service team never had any training. All my people needed was some intensive training. My boss gave me permission to join the American Society for Training and Development which cost \$120. With what I learned there, I turned the department around. Sales continued to slump the first quarter. Then they skyrocketed. Management was pleased with the sales and felt my job in customer service had played a real part in the turnaround; my boss was pleased because the solution was effective and cheap. I only had to replace two customer-service people.

3. **Why should I hire you?**

Your answer should be short and to the point. It will highlight areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills. Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need [itemize them]. I'm a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to make a thorough success."

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

The question will come only after a full explanation of the job has been given. If not, qualify the question with: "What voids are you trying to eradicate when you fill this position?" Then recap the interviewer's job description, followed with: "I can bring to this job a determination to see projects through to a proper conclusion. I listen and take direction well. I am analytical and don't jump to conclusions. And finally, I understand we are in business to make a profit so I keep an eye on cost and return. End with: "How do these qualifications fit your needs?" or "What else are you looking for?"

You finish with a question that asks for feedback or a powerful answer. If you haven't covered the interviewer's hot buttons, he or she will cover them now and you can respond accordingly.

5. **What would your references say?**

You have nothing to lose by being positive. If you demonstrate how well you and your boss got along, the interviewer does not have to ask "What do you dislike about your current manager?"

It is a good idea to ask past employers to give you a letter of recommendation. That way, you know what is being said. It reduces the chances of the company representative checking up on you, and if you are asked this question you can pull out of rousing accolades and hand them over. If your references are checked by the company, it must by law have your written permission. That permission is usually included in the application form you sign. All that said, never offer references or written recommendations unless they are requested.

6. **What is your biggest accomplishment?**

Keep your answers job related; from earlier exercises, a number of achievements should spring to mind. If you exaggerate contributions to a major project you will be accused of suffering from "coffee-machine syndrome", the afflictions of a junior clerk who claimed success for an Apollo space mission based on his relationships with certain scientists established at the coffee machine. You might begin your reply with: "Although I feel my biggest achievement is still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with ... I made my contribution as part of that team and learned a lot in the process. We did it with hard work concentration and an eye for the bottom line. "