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"If You Have An Apple And I Have An Apple And We Exchange Apples Then You And I Will Still Each Have One Apple. But If You Have An Idea And I Have An Idea And We Exchange These Ideas, Then Each Of Us Will Have Two Ideas."
--- **George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)**

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Interview Questions You May Be Asked...

Before attending an interview you should think about your responses to the following questions. Your answers may depend on the job or company in question, so you should go through your responses just before each interview.

Why do you want this job?

Think carefully about this question. Stress the positive aspects, which have attracted you to applying for this position. Do not mention the negative aspects of your current job or the job in question.

What qualities do you think will be required for this job?

Their advertisement for the job may help you a little bit, but you should also think of the other qualities that may be required. These may include leadership ability, supervisory skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving, analytical skills, etc.

What can you contribute?

This is your chance to shine. Tell them about your achievements in your previous position(s) which are relevant to the new position you are applying for.

Why do you want to work for this company?

Emphasis the positive reasons why you want to join their company, but avoid aspects such as more money or shorter hours. These would not endear you to a prospective employer.

What do you know about this company?

This is your chance to impress the interviewer with your knowledge of their company. Give them a run down of their products/services, sales figures, news, company figures, customers, etc.

What interests you about our product (or service)?

Again, your research into the company should aid you in answering this question.

What can we (the new company) offer that your previous company cannot offer?

Tread carefully here! Again do not mention money. Stress opportunities for personal growth, new challenges, etc.

You have not done this sort of job before. How will you cope/succeed?

Say that you are the sort of person who aims to succeed at everything you do and that you are very determined and will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Why should we employ you?

The answer to this question will be based on your previous experience and achievements which relate to the company. At the end you could add that you think there is a good fit between you and the job, and do ask the interviewer for their opinion.

How long do you think it would be before you were making a significant contribution to the team/company?

If you think that you could contribute from day one then say so. Then turn the question round on them and say how soon would they expect it.

How ambitious are you? Would you compete for my job?

Depending on the position you are applying for you may want to sound fairly ambitious, but do not look as if you are after the interviewer's position.

What do you like and dislike about the job we are discussing?

Likes: stress things such as a new challenge or the opportunity to bring fresh experience to the company. Dislikes: imply there is nothing to dislike about the job, which is why you are so interested.

Why did you choose a career in ...?

Be positive about your reasons. If you have changed careers make a logical argument as to why you did so.

Why are you changing careers?

This question will only be asked if you are making a radical change in your career. Always stress the positive aspects of the change rather than the negative aspects of your previous career - you do not want to come across as someone who is moving just because you hate your old career. Say why you think you will be good in the new career - this should come from your experience and achievements, stress the transferable skills you have, such as leadership ability, etc.

How much does your last job resemble the one you are applying for? What are the differences?

The interviewer is trying to see how well you would fit in to the position you are applying for. So you should stress the similarities rather than the differences. When it comes to discussing the differences it will help your case if you can show that either you have done something similar in the past or that you can quickly pick up the new skills.

What do you think of the last company you worked for?

You should stress the positive aspects of your last company saying that they were a good company to work for. Tell them about the training you received or the work related experience you gained.

Why did you join your previous company? Did they live up to your expectations? Why are you leaving now?

Always be positive about your reasons for joining and leaving a company. Be very careful that you do not say anything negative about your present employer. If you do, the new company will wonder what you will say about them when you leave. You might want to stress that you are looking for a new challenge and that you feel that the company who is interviewing you fits the bill!

Explain the organisational structure in your last company and how you fitted into it?

This sort of question may be used to find out whether your old job is at a comparable level to your new job. If the new job being discussed would be a step up the ladder you will need to show that you are ready for a more demanding position. You may be able to show that you have already had many of the responsibilities and the necessary skills which would be required for the next step.

How long have you been looking for a new job?

If you have been unemployed for a long time this may be a rather tricky question to answer. But be honest. If you have been away on holiday or done some voluntary work you could mention this.

Do you prefer to work in a small, medium or large company?

Remember where you are! If the company interviewing you is a small to medium sized company say that you enjoy a close atmosphere with a good team spirit. At a large company say that you enjoy the stability of working for a large and established company.

What are you looking for in a new job?

Make sure your answer fits in with the company who is interviewing you. A suitable reply would be that you are looking for a new job where you can apply your existing skills and learn new ones.

What would your ideal job be?

Again, remember where you are! Describe the job in terms of the criteria they have used to describe their job. An ideal job might include things like challenging work, a fair rate of pay for the job, nice colleagues, good career prospects, good team atmosphere, opportunity to learn new skills, apply old skills, etc.

Are you considering any other positions at the moment?

If you are say so, but do not give too many details away - it will weaken your negotiating position later. If you do not have any other job offers at the moment just say that you have a few irons in the fire.

What did you think of your manager/supervisor?

Say that he/she was the sort of person you could learn from and you communicated well, which meant that the task in hand was completed on time.

What did you do on a day to day basis?

Stress the positive things you did including your achievements. Even if some or much of it was paperwork, you can still show your interest in the way it was tackled.

Did you increase sales or profits in your last job?

This question is only relevant for senior managers or sales people. If you have increased sales and/or profit then do not be afraid to shout about it. If you have not increased sales say why not, e.g. general downturn in the market, etc. It might then be a good idea to mention an achievement in a previous job if your performance was better there.

Have you reduced costs at your last company?

If you have reduced costs say so - companies are always looking for ways to reduce costs.

How would you describe yourself? / How would others describe you?

Pick your best attributes and achievements from your career.

Do you consider yourself successful?

You should say you do. Pick some work related achievements that are in line with the position that you are discussing.

What was your greatest success? How did you achieve it?

You should pick an achievement which is related to their needs.

What has been your biggest failure?

Try to pick a failure which you were later able to correct or something that is not really important.

How could you improve yourself?

Do not mention anything negative about yourself - the interviewer is looking for a chink in your armour.

Did you feel you progressed satisfactorily in your last job?

If you progressed faster than normal you should say so. If growth was not as good as expected then be careful how you phrase this.

Are you a leader?

State how you have successfully acted as a leader, giving examples of your successes.

How do you handle criticism?

Your answer should be along the following lines: "I always think that it is important to get feedback on how I am performing so that I can improve any areas which my manager/supervisor highlights. Do you have regular staff appraisals and a staff development plan?"

What sort of manager are you? / What makes a good manager?

You should say that it is someone who listens to other people and can delegate whilst maintaining overall control of the task at hand, bringing in the project on time and to budget. Good planning skills are essential.

Do you work well with others? Or are you a loner?

Some jobs mean that you have to work very closely with other people whilst other jobs mean that you are largely working on your own, so you need to say that you are happy in both situations.

Do you need other people around to stimulate you or are you self-motivated?

You need to say that you are self-motivated.

Are you accepted into a team quickly?

Hopefully you can answer a resounding "Yes" to this question.

Can you act on your own initiative?

You should say that you can. You could ask how much responsibility you would have.

How do you run a meeting?

You could say that you must start with an agenda and stick to it. You could add that you would try to get the views and ideas from everyone present, working in an air of co-operation. If people moved off at a tangent you would bring them back to the item being discussed.

What motivates you?

Our suggestions are career growth, opportunity to learn new skills, good co-workers, etc.

What management style gets the best results out of you?

Try and think about how you have reacted to different managers and which factors have motivated you. Do not say too much in reply to this question, because if your answer is contrary to the management style of the company they will not be keen to employ you!

Do you know how to motivate other people?

Hopefully you can say "Yes", and say that you have to find out what motivates a person and give them recognition for a job well done. You should always give them encouragement and help them when required.

Are you competitive?

Your answer depends on the sort of job you are doing. If you will be working as part of a team you will need to show that you can work in the best interests of the team and not just for your own benefit.

Are you aggressive?

If you mean by this someone who gets things done, then the answer is "Yes". You need to defuse the implications of this question.

What do you dislike doing?

Say that you are prepared to do whatever it takes to get the job done well and on time and try to do disagreeable things first to get them out of the way rather than putting them off.

What problems did you encounter in your last job? What annoyed you about your last job?

Stick to the problems that you were able to solve, i.e. "I had problem X, which I later managed to resolve by doing Y". Show that you are a person who can solve problems rather than someone who lets things get on top of them.

What would you like to avoid in your next job?

You need to be positive here and say that there is nothing in particular that you would like to avoid.

Do you feel you are ready to take on greater responsibilities?

Show how you have progressed throughout your life and how you have accepted and taken on responsibility for the actions of yourself and others. If you have not really had many work related responsibilities you can mention other responsibilities you have had outside work.

Can you work under pressure?

You need to say that you can. You could ask how much pressure the job involves.

How many hours are you prepared to work?

You would be prepared to work the necessary hours to get the job done on time.

Do you mind working for someone older than yourself? Younger than you? Of the opposite sex?

Here you can say that you are prepared to work with anyone.

What are your career goals?

Link in your goals with the company who is interviewing you.

How did you get on with your previous manager/supervisor, co-workers and subordinates?

Hopefully you can say that you got on well with everyone.

Have you been responsible for implementing ISO9000/BS5750 or Total Quality Management (TQM)?

If you have, state how you implemented it successfully. If you have not, you will need to show that you are used to working to company quality standards or that you have a methodical approach to carrying out work.

What interests do you have outside work?

Your hobbies and interests can tell an employer a lot about you, including whether you are sociable or solitary, and whether you can take on 'leadership' roles. So you should think about which interests will paint the right picture of you given the position you are discussing.

If you have changed jobs a lot you may be asked how long you would stay in the new job.

You should state that you are looking for a long-term opportunity where you can learn and develop. You could then ask them if this applies to the job being discussed.

Have you ever been fired?

If you have, you will need to handle this question with great care. Try and put yourself in as favourable light as possible without being too dismissive. If you have later been able to correct any deficiency which resulted in you being fired you should tell the interviewer.

Are you too old for this job?

Tell them that you feel that your extra experience would enable you to make a bigger contribution to their company sooner than someone younger and less experienced.

Are you too young for this job?

"No, I do not think so!" is the answer you should give and then state the reason why you are not too young. If you have a lot of experience gained in a short time, say so.

You may be over qualified for this position?

Tell them that you feel that your extra experience would enable you to make a bigger contribution sooner than someone with less experience.

Are you prepared to relocate?

If you are, say so. If you do not want to move then you do not have to accept the job - try and come across as someone who is positive.

Are you willing to travel?

Again if you are, say so. You want to sound positive, so find out how much travelling is involved before you turn down the job.

How often are you off sick?

This can be a difficult question to answer if you are frequently off sick or you have just recovered from a prolonged period of illness. If you have generally enjoyed good health and this period of illness is not typical then you should say so.

What did you earn in your last job?

You have to be very careful when answering this question because once an interviewer knows your current salary they will try and fix your next remuneration based on this figure. This may be satisfactory if you only wanted a modest rise in salary and your current salary is in line with their salary range, but, what if your current salary is substantially lower than the rate for the job, or if you want a substantial salary rise? In these cases you would be best advised to say that you do not really want to prejudice yourself by being too high or too low. Ask if you can discuss this later after the responsibilities for the job have been discussed; you may also want to ask them what the range for the job is (if you do not already know).

What level of salary are you looking for now?

Be very careful when you answer this question - you do not want to appear to be greedy. If you are applying for a specific vacancy you could ask them what the salary range is. Once they have answered you could say "I think my experience would place me at the top end of your range, don't

you?" If they ask you this question fairly early on in the interview you could delay answering by saying "It is hard to discuss salary without first knowing a little bit more about the job and the responsibilities."

What will your referees say about you?

Say that you expect excellent references.

Difficult questions

If you cannot answer a question you might reply with "That's an interesting question - how would you tackle it?"

Fantasy questions

These sort of questions can be very difficult to answer. Such questions might include: "What would you do if you won the National Lottery?" You should give the answer, which in your opinion will give you the best chance of getting the job.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer...

The interview is a two-way process. The company interviewing you will want to find out whether you are suitable to the position and you will want to find out if the company and position are right for you. You should therefore ensure that you have enough information to make up your mind whether you want the job. For example:

- What will be my responsibilities?
- Where will I fit into the overall organisational structure?
- Who will I report to?
- Where does he/she fit in the structure?
- Who will report to me?
- How experienced are they?
- What do you expect me to do in the first 6 months?
- What level of performance do you expect from me?
- Who are your customers?
- Where is the company going? Upwards? Expansion plans?
- What are the chances of advancement/promotion in this position? When?
- What will be my salary, benefits and bonuses? [Do not bring this up too early in the interview - wait until they are sold on you.]
- Will travelling be required in this position?
- Will relocation be required now or in the future?
- What training do you provide?
- When will you decide on the appointment?
- What is the next step?

Answering Interview Questions – Difficult Questions – Personal Questions

These questions give you the opportunity to answer in a way that enables you to provide focused information about your skills and abilities.

Here are some common examples of this type of question:

Do you consider yourself a natural leader?

The ideal answer to this is 'yes', but in reality not all of us possess the confidence required to lead. You can substitute 'natural' with either 'competent' or 'conscientious', focusing more on leading by example with good organizational and interpersonal skills. Most professional jobs require an element of leadership that you should be taking the trouble to cultivate, whether it comes naturally or not.

Tell me about yourself?

This can be a frustratingly open question, but it does give you an excellent opportunity to communicate your skills and experience. Aim to keep your answer professionally orientated, specific to the characteristics that the interviewer may want to hear. Although your objective is to show you've got the perfect profile to fulfil the role, try to do so in a friendly manner so that you can show the

interviewer that you have an agreeable personality.

What are your biggest accomplishments?

Answers to this should always be job-related, impressive but also hinting that your best work is yet to come. Don't be hesitant or vague when answering this question. Show that you have a clear idea of your achievements to date.

Answering Interview Questions – Difficult Questions – Dangerous Questions

These questions give you the opportunity to overcome direct objections that the interviewer may have with your application. If these are not addressed, you will effectively rule yourself out as a serious candidate.

Here are some common examples of this type of question:

What did you dislike about your last job?

Ideally you would answer 'there was nothing I disliked', although this may not be realistic.

Hiring someone who easily fits into the existing complement of staff is very important, therefore steer clear of criticizing former colleagues or managers. Once again, if you pay attention to the company culture when they described the role to you, you can mention factors that would be likely to impress them.

How long have you been looking for another position?

If you are currently unemployed and have been looking for some time, try to minimize the 'time gap' by mentioning any other activities in which you have been involved, such as study or charity work.

If your work is of a specialist nature and you've been determined to continue in that field, point this out provided that it isn't at odds with the demands of the new role. A resourceful answer here can certainly score you points, instead of putting you at a disadvantage.

Why aren't you earning more at your this stage of your career?

This is another implied negative, which can be turned into a positive by emphasizing your desire to gain solid experience instead of continually changing jobs for the sake of money.

This question gives you scope to ask; "How much do you think I should be earning?" This could possibly lead to an offer.

Why have you changed jobs so frequently?

This is another question that can prove difficult. The best response can be to blame it on your need to gain experience and grow.

Emphasize that the variety of jobs has been good experience and that you're now more mature and settled. Questions like this can be turned around, but be careful not to dwell too much on the subject, or over-justify yourself.

Why were you made redundant?

If you were made redundant as a result of a re-organization; then this is a legitimate excuse that most recruiters will understand - they have probably been involved with laying off people themselves at some time.

Try to give acceptable reasons, such as downsizing or restructuring. Try to be brief and to matter-of-fact, encouraging the interviewer to move on.

Why were you fired?

If, however, you were fired and cannot realistically pass it off as a redundancy, then it's advisable to be open and honest whilst minimizing the reason for your dismissal. Try to portray the incident as 'one of those unlucky things that happens to the best of us' and modestly explain how you've learnt from the experience and the steps you've since taken. The objective is to put the interviewer at ease in the hope that they won't place too much importance on a reference check. It is however a good idea to reconcile with your former employers and ask them to at least give you a fair reference.