

Twenty Tough Questions

“Are you prepared with the Answers?”

Most of us THINK we are!

1. *“Tell me about yourself.”*

Just talk for two minutes. Be logical. (Start anywhere, e.g. high school, college, or first position. Looking for communication skills, linear thinking. Also try to score a point or two (describe a major personal attribute.)

2. *“Why are you leaving your current position?”*

This is a very critical question. Don't "bad mouth" a previous employer. Don't sound "too opportunistic." Best when there are major problems, or buy-out, or layoff, it is good to state that *‘after long personal consideration, your chance to make a contribution is very low due to company changes.’*

3. *“What do you consider your most significant accomplishment?”*

This can get you the job. Prepare extensively. Score points. Tell a 2-minute story, with details and discuss personal involvement. Make the accomplishments worth achieving. Discuss hard work, long hours, pressure, and important company issues at stake.

4. *“Why do you believe you are qualified for this position?”*

Pick two or three main factors about the job, and about you that are most relevant. Discuss for two minutes, with specific details. Select a technical skill, a specific management skill (organizing, staffing, planning), and a personal success attribute to mention.

5. *“Have you ever accomplished something you didn't think you could?”*

Interviewer is trying to determine your goal orientation, work ethic, personal commitment, and integrity. Provide a good example where you overcame numerous difficulties to succeed. Prove you're not a quitter, and that you'll get going when the going gets tough."

6. "What do you like or dislike most about your current position?"

Interviewer is trying to determine compatibility with open position. If you have an interest in this position, be careful. Stating your dislike of overtime or getting into details, or that you like "management" can cost you the position. There's nothing wrong with liking challenges, pressure situations, opportunities to grow, or disliking bureaucracy and frustrating situations.

7. "How do you handle pressure? Do you like or dislike these situations?"

High achievers tend to perform well in high-pressure situations. Conversely, the question would imply the position is pressure packed and out of control. There is nothing wrong with this as long as you know what you're going into. If you do perform well under stress, provide a good example with details, giving an overview of the stress situation. Let the interviewer "feel" the stress by your description of it.

8. "The sign of a good employee is the ability to take initiative. Can you describe situations like this about yourself?"

A proactive, results oriented person doesn't have to be told what to do. This is one of the major attributes. To convince the interviewer you possess this trait you must give a series of short examples, describing your self-motivation. Try to describe at least one example in depth. The extra effort, strong work ethic and creative side of you must be demonstrated.

9. "What's the worst or most embarrassing aspect of your business career? How would you have done things differently now with 20/20 hindsight?"

This is a general question to learn how introspective you are, and, if you can learn from your mistakes. If you can, it indicates an open, more flexible personality. Don't be afraid to talk about your failures, particularly if you've learned from them. This is a critical aspect of high potential individuals.

10. "How have you grown or changed over the past few years?"

This requires thought. Maturation, in technical skills, or increased self-confidence is important aspects of human development. To discuss this effectively is indicative of a well-balanced, intelligent individual. Overcoming personal obstacles or recognizing manageable weaknesses can brand you as an approachable and able employee.

11. "What do you consider your most significant strengths?"

Be prepared. Know your four or five strengths. Be able to discuss each with a specific example. Select those attributes that are most compatible with the job opening. Most people say

"management" or "good interpersonal skills," in answer to this. Don't unless you can describe the specific characteristics of management (planning, organizing, results, staffing, etc.) or how your relationship skills have proven critical to your success.

12. "What do you consider your most significant weaknesses?"

Don't reveal deep character flaws. Rather, discuss tolerable faults which you are working toward improving. Show by specific example how this has changed over time. Better still; show how a weakness can be turned into a strength. For example, how concentration on details results in higher quality work even though it requires much overtime.

13. "Deadlines, frustrations, difficult people, and many rules can make a job difficult. How do you handle these types of situations?"

Most companies, unfortunately, face these types of problems daily. If you can't deal with petty frustrations you'll be seen as a problem. You certainly can state your displeasure at the petty side of these issues; but how you overcome them is more important. Diplomacy, perseverance, and common sense often prevail even in difficult circumstances. This is part of corporate America, and you must be able to deal with it on a regular basis.

14. "One of our biggest problems is ? What is your experience with this? How would you deal with it?"

Think on your feet. Ask questions to get details. Break it into sub-parts. Highly likely you have some experience with the sub-sections. Answer these, and summarize the total. State how you would go about solving the problem, if you can't answer directly. Be specific. Show your organizational and analytical skills.

15. "How do you compare your technical skills to your management skills?"

Many people tend to minimize their technical skill, either because they don't have any, or they don't like getting into the detail. Most successful managers possess good technical skills and get into enough detail to make sure they understand the information being presented by their group. Try for a good balance here if you want to be seriously considered for the position.

16. "How has your technical ability been important in accomplishing results?"

Clearly the interviewer believes he needs a strong level of technical competence. Most strong managers have good technical backgrounds, even if they have gone away from detail. Describe specific examples of your technical wherewithal; but don't be afraid to say you're not current.

Also, you could give an example of how you resolved a technical issue by "accelerated research."

17. "How would you handle a situation with tight deadlines, low employee morale, and inadequate resources?"

If you pull this off effectively, it indicates you have strong management skills. Need to be creative. An example would be great. Relate your toughest management task, even if it doesn't meet all the criteria. Most situations don't Organizational skills, interpersonal skills, and handling pressure are key elements of effective management. Good managers should be able to address each issue, even if they were not concurrent. Deftly handling the question is pretty indicative of your skills.

18. "Are you satisfied with your career to date? What would you change if you could?"

Be honest. Interviewer wants to know if he can keep you happy. It's important to know if you're willing to make some sacrifice to get your career on the right track. Degree of motivation is an instant selection criterion.

19. "What are your career goals? Where do you see yourself five years from now? Ten years? "

Most importantly, be realistic! Blue-sky stuff brands you as immature. One or two management jumps in three to five years is a reasonable goal. If your track record indicates you're on line for senior management in ten years, it's okay to mention. However, if you've had a rocky road, better to be introspective.

20. "Why should we hire you for this position? What kind of contribution would you make?"

Good chance to summarize. By now, you know their key issues. Restate them and show how you would address them. Relate to specific attributes and specific accomplishments. Qualify responses with the need to gather information. Don't be cocky. Demonstrate a thoughtful, organized, cohesive summary of what immediate contributions and longer-term contributions you are confident in fulfilling.