

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below are questions you should be prepared to answer. There are many more examples than you will likely be asked but scan them and at least think about how you might respond.

Questions You Should be Prepared to be Asked

VALUES

1. Where do you view your role in the customer/company chain in our organizational setting, i.e.
 - As a Buyer of Products/Services (Customer)
 - As a Provider of Products/Services (Supplier)
 - As Processor of Services

Why?

2. How will you participate in achieving the goals and objectives of this organization?
3. Who has had the greatest influence on you and why?
4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
5. How long will you stay with the organization?
6. Do you have any questions? You better have some!
7. If you could structure the perfect job for yourself, what would you do and why?
8. In what areas do you feel you would like to develop further? How do you plan to do that?
9. Can you share with me your philosophy and style on being a team member and a leader?
10. What are some examples of challenges you have overcome and the results?
11. How do you feel about being a member of a team? Tell me about teams you have been on.
12. What do you know/what experience do you have?
13. How would you respond to feedback?



DATA GATHERING

1. Where are you originally from?
2. Have you looked at other jobs/opportunities to date?
3. Where is your spouse or significant other from?
4. Does your spouse have any occupation or employment considerations?
5. How does your spouse feel about the community and their career opportunities here if there are any?
6. Could you review your education for me? Licensure? Certifications?
7. Training and Work History:
8. Current responsibilities:
 - Current week – Work/office hours/schedule?
 - Leadership
 - Major areas of responsibility?
 - Do you have budget authority?
 - For what
 - What is your budget
 - Major accomplishments: What were they, what challenges did they present and what was the result?
 - What challenges do you think we might have? What would your action plan look like?
 - What would you do if you saw a peer or the management do something unethical or illegal?
 - Describe the political environment in your current and previous position/organization
 - What KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) do you count on now and would they be the same here?
 - Describe a couple of instances where you were made accountable for a project or business line but had no previous experience, competencies, or skills in using the tools or understanding of the processes commonly used to manage such a project or business line
 - What would your fiercest critic say about you and why?
 - Describe your failures
 - Under what circumstances would you not take on a new responsibility?



9. Is there anything in your background that could be perceived as a negative when a background investigation is done?

COGNITIVE ABILITIES

1. Why are you considering this opportunity?

OBJECTIVE: To determine if you have taken the time to evaluate the organization? Have you done your own homework

(Response should be short and factual.)

2. What interests you most about this opportunity?

OBJECTIVE: Determine if the candidate is clear on their role as a team member.

3. Describe your current position.

4. What have you been criticized for during the last four years? Do you agree/disagree? Why?

5. What things would your colleagues say about you that need improving? Do you agree/disagree?

6. We have talked about your interests outside of work, I want to know about your perceptions, what do you think mine are?

OBJECTIVE: Tests your intuitive ability, can you make decisions without facts?

7. How do you feel about economy?

8. Do you have any reservations about our organization?

9. Under what conditions have you been most successful in any undertaking?

Analysis:

This question probes the conditions under which you work best. Your response will reveal information about your preferred way of working, factors that influence your chances of success, and possibly your limitations.

Winner Answer:

My approach to problem solving involves a systematic process of gathering relevant information and a problem, clearly identifying the problem, setting a strategy, and then

implementing it. Most people skip the first two parts and jump straight to strategy. As long as I have enough information and a clear view of the problem, I can tackle anything.

Critique:

This response demonstrates that the applicant has solved difficult problems in the past, has thought about strategy, and has developed a method for solving difficult problems. It also shows a sense of confidence and willingness to use proven skills in the future.

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

1. Why should we hire you?

OBJECTIVE: Determine poise and confidence

(Response should be short, not a lengthy regurgitation of the C.V.)

2. People have different motivations for working; some work for economic security, others enjoy managing, still others wish to create and some may simply aspire to get rich. What is most important to you, and why?
3. What causes you to lose your temper?
4. What is your philosophy on management - support staff relations?
5. What would your subordinates say about you?
6. How do you criticize subordinates?
7. How many hours are you used to working? Extended hours?
8. Describe the kind of people you like, don't like, and why?
9. Tell me about two serious interpersonal relationship problems you've had on your job(s).
10. How open are you to receiving criticism?
11. Let's say, for example, that you discovered that a someone at this organization made a critical error, seriously jeopardizing a our brand or company. How would you handle it?
12. What are you looking for in an opportunity as it pertains to community, quality of life, quality of work, financial rewards, work style, work-life balance, etc.?
13. What are your top priorities right now professionally and personally?



14. How do you see them changing in the future?
15. If you were to list everything you were looking for in a job, what percentage of those things does your current job have?
16. Of the things you don't have, why not and what have you done to get them?
17. Is there anything else that is motivating you or will motivate you to seek out a new job/opportunity?
18. What is your greatest strength and weakness, and how will these affect your performance here?

Analysis:

The biggest danger with this question is that it is really two questions in one, plus a follow-up. The two pitfalls here are taking the part about strengths not seriously enough, and taking the part about weaknesses too seriously. It is important to remember that your responses will not only inform the interviewer of your assets and liabilities but also present a broad view of your values and your sense of self-worth.

Winner Answer:

In terms of strengths, I believe my greatest asset is that I have a highly organized mind, capable of creating order out of confusion. My greatest weakness perhaps is that I have little patience for people who don't value the same sense of order that I do. I believe my organizational skills can help this organization achieve its goals more quickly, and that my appreciation for streamlining complex problems can sometimes rub off on my co-workers.

Critique:

This response does three important things. It clearly identifies the applicant's greatest strength. It identifies a weakness that really could just as easily be perceived as a strength. Finally, it points out the benefits of the applicant's strength and weakness both to the organization and to other employees.

19. Have you ever been put on the spot by a teach, professor, advisor, or superior when you've felt unsure of yourself? How did you respond?

Analysis:

This question probes your ability to work in unfamiliar territory. It is designed to get a picture of your willingness and ability to tackle assignments that are a stretch beyond current levels of competence.

Winner Answer:

I tried to make the most of my years in school, so I often took courses in areas I was unfamiliar with. Consequently, I often got challenged by my professors/colleagues. Whenever I found myself in a situation where I knew less than I might about a subject I tried to anticipate the questions, so that I'd be prepared to respond. When challenged I'd try to make as educated a guess as possible, acknowledge what I didn't know, and take it from there. For example [give an illustration if you have one],...

Critique:

The strongest thing about this response is that it articulates the applicant's willingness to deal with difficult situations. It also shows that the applicant has ambition and a clear sense of how to approach novel and ambiguous problems.

20. In what ways have you been a leader?

Analysis:

Leadership potential is one of the most highly valued traits in the corporate world today. Your response to this question can go a long way in the campaign for a job offer.

Winner Answer:

I've had several jobs where I've played a leadership role, responsible for seeing that jobs get done, and I've always had successful outcomes. More important though, I feel in the past few years that I've developed an ability to spot potential in others and have been able to foster their development. For me, that's the real challenge of leadership - helping others meet their potential.

Critique:

This response indicates that the applicant has a successful track record (adding an illustration would even strengthen it). More important, it shows that you have an understanding of what the outcome of effective leadership can be, thus suggesting that you are speaking from experience.

21. In your adult life what accomplishment has given you the most satisfaction?

Analysis:

The response to this question will give the interviewer a quick insight into your personal values and standards. What you choose to speak about will create an immediate impression of what you hold in high esteem.

Winner Answer:

In my last job I took over my boss's responsibilities for two months while she was ill. Although I was relatively new to my own position, I was able to pick up the additional

responsibilities and effectively meet the demands of both positions. It felt really satisfying to be able to respond to a crisis like that and deliver.

Critique:

The strength of this response is that it relates a unique accomplishment, emphasizes your commitment and diligence, and suggests formidable competence. By addressing the nature of your satisfaction, the you paint a picture of a highly desirable candidate – one both willing and able to perform at an unusually high level.

22. What would you do differently if you were to start college/training and/or your career all over again?

Analysis:

This question is designed to see if you – particularly the recent graduate – has made the transition from student to adult in the way he or she thinks about learning.

Winner Answer:

I think if I were to start school all over again I would be less intimidated by the whole process. I would challenge my teachers/professors more; and I would use what I've learned about the system to make it work more to my advantage, to ensure that I got the most from the experience.

Critique:

This response shows that you have demystified the training or college experience and have developed a critical eye for analyzing experiences and systems. The response suggests that you have high standards and is committed to high-quality learning.

23. What have been your greatest disappointments and how did you respond?

Analysis:

Like the previous question, this one goes directly to the maturity issue. It reveals information about your standards, values and priorities.

Winner Answer:

When I first got out of training/college, I initially thought I would find a job and career with an organization that would last a lifetime. Once I got into the market I realized that finding the right job in the right company might take a while. Now that I understand the way the job market works a little better, I can handle it. The good jobs may take a little longer to find but in the long run I think it pays to be really careful.

Critique:

This response shows that your priority is career stability. By emphasizing the quality of one's work situation as a key concern the applicant projects a sense of maturity and depth

of understanding of the world of work. The response also suggests that you can handle uncertainty - an important survival skill.

24. What are the most important rewards you expect from a job?

Analysis:

Once again, what you choose to talk about directly reflects your level of maturity just as much as the position you take. Also important here is to remember the "no money talk" rule. Unless you're in negotiation, avoid talking about money.

Winner Answer:

What's most important to me is that the job I take is a good match. By that I mean it will allow me to do what I do well - thus giving me a sense of satisfaction. I also want a job that demands that I stretch myself beyond my current level, forcing me to develop myself.

Critique:

This double-barreled response--satisfaction from a job well done and the stretching of personal limits for growth--will leave the interviewer eating out of the palm of your hand.

25. Under what circumstances have your associates relied on you?

Analysis:

One of the ways employers measure maturity is by assessing the extent to which an applicant demonstrates an ability to work with others. This question is targeted toward measuring your ability to engender trust from others and to work cooperatively.

Winner Answer:

I've often tried to look at the people I work with as a team. I think it makes sense in a competitive environment. Consequently I've often relied on co-workers and encouraged them to rely on me. One of the ways I try to do that is, for example, when I'm working on a particular project with someone else, I like to look at the strengths each of us brings to that project and then delineate roles based on our expertise. It usually works out pretty well.

Critique:

This response suggests that you know how to create cooperative working relationships and have been successful in the past in gaining others' confidence. This response could be made even stronger by illustration--giving an example of an actual project in which you created the sort of "expertise sharing" mentioned in the response.

26. What do you feel it takes to be a professional?

Analysis:

This question tells the interviewer how well you are established in the working world. It also tells the interviewer the extent to which you think of yourself as a serious, career-minded person rather than just another job hunter.

Winner Answer:

To me, being a professional means that for any task I take on I do what needs to be done to achieve results. More than that it means taking responsibility for my own performance. Being a professional means most of all being my own taskmaster - in charge, you might say, of my own quality control.

Critique:

The greatest strength of this response is its language. By using such phrases as "achieve results," "responsibility for my own performance," and "my own quality control," the you present yourself as someone who delivers, needs little supervision, and understands the importance of self-motivation.

27. What types of situations really get you down?

Analysis:

This question is meant to discover your Achilles' heel. It will tell the interviewer what sorts of stress and pressure cause you to lose perspective, motivation, and performance ability.

Winner Answer:

I think the thing that bothers me most, and it doesn't happen often, is when a problem lingers too long. I don't think there's room in most successful organizations for unresolved problems. I like to find good solutions as quickly as possible so we can get on with the business of the organization.

Critique:

This response offers a real answer but not a debilitating one. It gives the interviewer a reasonable response but doesn't cause worry about your ability. It reassures the interviewer that you are committed to both quality and timeliness.

28. What do you do when you know you're right and others disagree with you?

Analysis:

This question probes your ability to work with opposing viewpoints and to tolerate the accompanying stress. It also probes your comfort and ability when handling conflict.

Winner Answer:

First, I make sure I have enough accurate information to maintain my position. Once I'm really convinced my perspective is the one to go with, I pay close attention to the particulars of the opposition's objections. I try to reason with them by looking at the situation from their perspective. Given mutual commitment I find agreement can eventually be reached.

Critique:

This answer does several things. It shows that you approach conflict resolution from a problem-solving, win-win perspective. It shows that you are open to change if that's what is called for. Finally, it shows that you take a collaborative approach to solving difficult problems.

ANALYTICAL REASONING

1. Likes and dislikes in current position.
2. How do you overcome obstacles?
3. What do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
4. Walk me through each of these accomplishments in detail from A to Z.

OBJECTIVE: Can you articulate the events in detail?

5. What is the most difficult thing you ever had to do in your job and tell me how you dealt with it?
6. What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?
7. How do you solve problems?
8. What would you do to improve things and have you? What did you do?
9. What are the variables that would prevent you from seeking out and acquiring a better opportunity?
10. How do you go about influencing someone to accept your ideas?

Analysis:

The response to this question will tell the interviewer, first, how comfortable you are with the notion of influencing others, and second, how able you are in this area.



Winner Answer:

That's something I've worked very hard on over the years. At some point I realized that good ideas, even great ideas, sometimes don't get received that way. I now appreciate the fact that the way you present an idea is just as important as the idea itself. When trying to influence people I usually try to put myself in their position and think about their perspective. I'm then able to present thoughts to them in a way more likely to end in success.

Critique:

This response demonstrates your appreciation for the complexity of interpersonal communication and the difficulty in getting others to change their minds. you convey an understanding of the importance of strategy when influencing someone and articulates a reasoned approach. Finally, you demonstrate an understanding of the importance of form as well as substance when communicating under difficult circumstances.

11. How do you get along with co-workers?

Analysis:

The response to this question, along with the previous ones on superior-subordinate relationships and friendships, gives the interviewer an overall impression of your ability to communicate effectively. In a sense it is the most critical of the communication questions because 80 percent of the people who leave their jobs, according to the department of labor, do so because they don't fit in with the other people. Your ability to communicate your effectiveness in peer relationships will help ease the interviewer's concern that you may be yet another bad match.

Winner Answer:

I generally get along very well with co-workers. Occasionally I might run into a conflict with someone. When that happens I usually focus on what the conflict is about rather than on personalities. I find that this approach helps me maintain a respectful relationship with anyone-and often leads to resolution and strengthened relationships.

Critique:

This response suggests that you are a well-balanced person, possessing a high level of human relations skills. By making the distinction between problems and personalities, you appear to be someone who has worked out problems in the past and has a history of successful interpersonal relationships.

12. What are the most important characteristics you are looking for in a job and why?



Analysis:

This question challenges your rational thought process by presenting an open-ended inquiry into your priorities. As important as your response to this question is your ability to demonstrate an understanding of what "a good job" might be.

Winner Answer:

I'm looking for a job that utilizes my strongest skills, such as [name specific skills]. I think it's also important that my role in the organization be clearly tied to the goals of the organization. Ultimately it would also be great to have a job that is at times challenging, one that stretches me beyond my current abilities.

Critique:

Although fairly brief, this response accomplishes three things: It highlights your skills, demonstrates your understanding of the need for relevance in one's job, and shows your understanding of the importance of change and development.

13. What is the most intellectually challenging thing you are looking for in a job and why?

Analysis:

This question probes your understanding of the need to choose applicants who can think critically. Your response will give the interviewer a glimpse of your problem-solving capacity.

Winner Answer:

I think it's important to be involved in the short- and long-range planning going on in the organization. I'd like to think that wherever I ended up in a company I could be involved in some way with its strategy development activities. Knowing and being a part of where an organization is going is the most intellectually challenging aspect of work for me.

Critique:

This response indicates that you value intellectual challenge and the stretching of personal limits. It also suggests that you are motivated toward learning about the organization's future and making a contribution to its future endeavors.

14. What is the most intellectually challenging thing you have ever done?

Analysis:

This question begins to probe your level of intelligence. It provides the interviewer with a glimpse of your potential problem-solving ability.

Winner Answer:

A couple of years ago I worked in a group that was switching over to a new (operating process, billing/invoicing software, manufacturing system, ...). I was right out of training,

but I was able, because of some of my hobby computer interests, to help debug the system. It was really exciting because I was learning as I was doing, but in the long run I was able to suggest some changes that were implemented.

Critique:

The strength of this response is that it illustrates your ability to take prior learning, apply it to a new situation, learn from experience, and apply the new learning.

15. What are some of the most creative things you have done?

Analysis:

In addition to obviously probing for examples of creativity, this question also investigates what aspects of creativity you most value.

Winner Answer:

One of my most creative periods was when I helped a friend run for political office. Essentially I was responsible for running her campaign, which meant creating a platform on which to run, developing strategies for campaigning, and coming up with ways to increase our support base. For example, one thing we did was run free Saturday clinics, where families could access care and find out about our positions. It was a very creative period in my life because we were constantly trying to find new angles to pursue.

Critique:

The strength of this response lies in its application of creative skills to a complex situation. You portray the ability to approach a multifaceted task in a creative, problem-solving way. By giving a specific example, you demonstrate the capacity to be a creative problem solver.

16. If you could construct your own job within our organization, what factors would you include?

Analysis:

This question is aimed at your understanding of the complexity of the contemporary and complex workplace. Its intent is to understand your appreciation for the need to hire people who can make a range of contributions.

Winner Answer:

First, I'd want it to be a job that could use my strongest skills, specifically [mention specific skills]. I'd also want it to be a judgment job, one that was really necessary to meet the goals of the organization. Ideally it would also be one that allowed for some growth and diversification in the future.

Critique:

This response demonstrates your understanding that a good match involves hiring someone whose skills are needed, whose function is clear, and whose potential is great. It leaves the interviewer with a sense that you would most likely make a rich contribution if chosen.

17. What are your personal long-term and short-term goals? How did you determine them? How on a long-term and short-term basis do you prepare to meet them?

Analysis:

This is a difficult question because it is really a four-part statement requiring a multitude of responses. Important to remember with this set of questions--and they are often presented as a set--is that you are being asked about personal goals, not professional ones. This is important because chances are you will be asked separately about professional aspirations, and if you don't distinguish the two you are left with the less than impressive choice of having to repeat yourself. Also important to note is that this question is in the planning and organizing section because it sheds light on your ability to use these skills in your personal life.

Winner Answer:

Like any realistic goals, mine change periodically. My personal strategy, both long- and short-term, is to assess continually where I am in relation to a current goals and modify plans as required. For example, every five years I establish a personal plan with an overall goal and set of objectives. I review my progress every six months and make the necessary modifications. My current plan obviously includes a career shift toward more satisfying work, leadership. Aside from that I'm meeting the personal goals I've set most recently.

Critique:

This response shows an organized mind, one adept at planning. By discussing your approach to personal goal setting you are able to convey a sense of self-esteem and confidence in your ability manage personal affairs.

18. How important are details to you?

Analysis:

This question will tell the interviewer how careful you are. It will reveal information about your sense of quality and your willingness and ability to do a thorough job.

Winner Answer:

I think that attention to detail can make the difference between acceptable results and excellent results. Building in quality controls from the start of a project is, I believe, a way to ensure that the project has the best possible outcome. I believe the more careful you

are in the early stages of a project the less likely you are to have problems in the later stages.

Critique:

This response assures the interviewer that you appreciate the need for quality control. It also demonstrates an understanding of the planning process and shows that you have done some thinking about, and perhaps had some success with, planning and organizing projects in the past.

APTITUDE

1. What do you dislike doing? Professionally and Personally?

OBJECTIVE: Above two questions will tell you their strengths and weaknesses.

PERSONAL INTERESTS

1. What do you like doing? Professional and Personally?
2. Is there anything different that your spouse is looking for in a community that we have not yet discussed?
3. What are your interests outside of work?
4. What are your spouse's interests or hobbies?