

# ***THE FIVE MOST ASKED QUESTIONS***

## ***IN INTERVIEWS***

**QUESTION:** I'm embarking on a job search. It's been a long time since I've had to interview. What are the five most asked questions in interviews? How should I prepare for them?

**I'LL GO YOU ONE BETTER THAN FIVE:** I'll give you the six most asked and also tell you about a type of question that's increasingly asked in interviews, why it's a good type of question to ask and how to respond.

According to our research, the six most frequently asked questions are:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What can you do for us?/What skills do you bring to the table for us?
3. Why are/did you leave your last employer?
4. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
5. Why should we hire you?
6. What are your 5-10 year goals?

How to prepare for them? Research the big three: the job, the company and the people. Based on what you know about them, their needs and their requirements, **WRITE OUT** your answers for the firm or organization where you are interviewing to each of the six questions.

If there are a series of interviews, do this for each interview since your responses may modify to better respond to needs and requirements you learned about in earlier interviews, and subsequent research you've done on them (e.g. reading annual reports, sales and service literature; speaking with others who know the organization, its people and needs).

A few tips on answers:

- Essentially, questions 1, 2, 4, and 5 are the same question. Your answers focus on the key skills and abilities you want to communicate built around their job requirements. Caveat: the essence of these questions and your answers is the same, but the wording of your answers should be conversational and not static.
- To respond to the "weakness" question, you might say, "I prefer to do x than to do y," or "colleagues say I'm better at x than y." You might also talk about something that has been a problem for you and what you've done to overcome it (e.g. "I used to have a difficult time addressing a group of people, so I joined Toastmasters and now I know how to prepare and deliver a talk to a group.") Don't take this question lightly or answer frivolously. Give thought and write out your answer. (Interviewers ask this question to gauge how good an understanding you have of yourself and your abilities.)
- The goals question can be answered in two parts: career goals and life goals. (What are your 10-year goals? Why not write them down right now?)

The type of question being more frequently asked is the behavior-based question; how did you perform in a past situation that would be similar to requirements of the position for which you are being interviewed?

Behavior Based questions (let's call them BBQs for simplicity) ask about an applicant's past behavior in areas needed in the new job.

Typically they begin, "Could you tell me about a time when you . . . ?" or "Could you give me an example of when you . . . ?" They can also be a simple follow up to something you said you did, either in the interview or on your resume: "Why and how did you do that?"

BBQs are about past behavior, "How did you do . . . ?" not about the future, "How would you do . . . ?"

Many interviewers are trained to ask these questions since they can uncover a wealth of information quickly about an applicant's experience, not only what they did but also why and how. Moreover a good interviewer can probe for several skills sought.

For example, an interviewer might ask how and when the applicant organized their work for the day and get a sense of organizational skills, prioritizing, decision making, multitasking ability and how the person responds to interruptions and urgent (but unscheduled) requests - all from listening and probing about one BBQ.

To prepare for these types of questions, list what you understand or anticipate will be core competencies and essential functions of the job you're interviewing for, then think of things you've done that demonstrate those skills and abilities. Write out your responses using an "SAR" format:

**Situation:** Why did you do what you did? What level were you working at?

**Actions:** A series of I statements that show your work or management style.

I (verb) . . . .  
I (verb) . . . .  
I (verb) . . . .  
I (verb) . . . .

**Results:** Quantify whenever possible: How long did it take to do this? How many people benefited? How much did you save (or make) the organization? How many pages were in the report? What was the size of staff and budget you managed? How many was the report distributed to? What percentage increase or decrease (in time, money or performance rate) did your behavior result in?

To recap, to prepare for interviews, research as much as you can about the organization, the people and the job; write out your answers to the six most frequently asked questions; and prepare proactive Situation-Action-Results examples that demonstrate skills and qualities sought by the hiring organization.

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