



CAREERS

News & Ideas about your career.
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International Leadership Institute, providing leadership and career development programs, services and publications in the U.S. and Europe since 1985

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Interview for Success (from *21st Century Jobs*)

By Sara Tusek

Interviews are a special type of conversation

A job interview, however relaxed it may seem, has just one purpose from the perspective of the employer: to quickly assess the job-related strengths and weaknesses of the candidate and to imagine the candidate working in the organization.

What seem like perfectly normal questions are often traps for the unwary; the more cordial and friendly the interviewer, the more likely an inexperienced job-seeker is to walk straight into the trap.

In addition, it's quite likely that the interviewer is not a full-time interviewer, with lots of experience in putting people at ease and all the time in the world to listen to rambling answers. He or she may be your potential boss, or a human resources person with many other responsibilities. Your ability to stick to the point in the interview will be welcome.



Common interview questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- In what period of your life did you feel the most successful? The least successful?
- What are your career goals?

- What do your accomplishments communicate about your values and beliefs?
- How have you influenced others?
- What past jobs have you had, and how did you like them?
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- What would your best friend say about you? Your worst enemy?
- Have your accomplishments been deliberate or accidental?
- Describe a team situation that worked well in your life. Now describe one that didn't work well.
- What personal characteristics do you have that are of the greatest value to your friends?
- What good qualities did you inherit or learn from your family?
- What have you been praised for in your life? What have you been criticized for?
- Who are your heroes? Why?
- Describe something you created or designed that gave you a strong sense of satisfaction. Why did you feel satisfied about it?

(to p. 2)



Interviewing for Success

from p. 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

This is a common opener, and your first chance to establish your framework for the interview. The interviewer most likely already has some basic facts about you, from your resume, so this is not really an information-sharing question. Rather, it’s the first time the interviewer can talk with you in person, in action.

The bits of information you share about yourself begin with what’s on the resume. This is safe, as the interviewer probably has this information already, and has decided to interview you. Starting with some nice, non-emotional facts makes you feel more confident. If you feel unsure, you can always ask for some feedback—“is there anything in particular you’d like me to explain?”—if you sense the interviewer has a particular agenda.

If your first interview is on the telephone or via computer, then you have to be even more careful of what you say and how you say it. Humor rarely travels well across artificial communication means, so don’t try for whimsy or cuteness. Be straightforward and concise in your responses.

Be positive!

The cardinal rule of interviews is “never say anything negative.” The smallest criticism or complaint at this point becomes your identity. Never mind that the criticism is fully justified; the interviewer will assume, if you criticize anyone not in the room at the moment, that you’ll do the same to him or her when you leave the room. This is a bad way to start a relationship.

There’s an unspoken agreement between employer and employee that each will contribute a certain amount of loyalty to each other. This loyalty includes the notion that you keep a united front to the world that your organization is doing just fine, thank you. Your interviewer wants to know how much loyalty he can expect from you.

Of course, this mutual loyalty may be frayed or broken due to changed circumstances when you actually work there, but at least in the interview, you need to show a willingness to defend the people in your life from criticism. If you have any past experi-

ences that were not entirely positive, take time before the interview to devise a way to speak gently of that experience. For instance, if you were fired from a job, for any reason (even if you weren’t at fault), and the interviewer asks about it, focus on what you learned in that job and move on.

“What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?”

This is a classic interview question. For the “greatest strength,” you should have a nice, brief story prepared to illustrate your communication skills, or organizational skills, or whatever is appropriate for the job.

For your weaknesses, choose one that’s not fatal to the performance of the job—for example, you can confess to weak chemistry skills if the job doesn’t call for them. Avoid statements such as “I just work too hard! I’m always the last person to leave the office!”, as you may sound insincere.

“What are your career goals?”

This is the most important question of all, for the interviewer who’s seriously interested in you. Although an organization may promise upward mobility, at the moment the interviewer is only trying to fill the job in question. It’s reassuring to the interviewer when your career goals nicely mesh with the job.

Your career goals must have some connection with the job you want, or you are wasting your time, and the time of the interviewer. So tailor your goals accordingly.

With good preparation, beginning with a thorough knowledge of your own qualifications and the requirements of the job in question, you can have a satisfying, productive interview that may lead to a new job, a job that you can like and do best.

Good luck!

To get help in the career development process, you can attend the “21st Century Jobs Seminar,” led by Jarda Tusek, President of the International Leadership Institute (www.ili.cc). You can buy a copy of the course textbook, 21st Century Jobs, for \$10.00 plus postage by contacting Sara Tusek, ILI

