

QUIZZICAL QUESTIONS

Insight from Employers on Those Tough Interview Questions!

by Erika Brandt, AgCareers.com Marketing and Communications Manager

If you've done much interviewing or are preparing to start, you've probably run across questions that get asked in most every interview.

Of course it is great to practice what you might respond with, but what is it that employers are really looking for when asking that particular question.

Well, we've found out! We've asked several industry experts to provide us with points on what they are looking for in a response when asking some of the more difficult interview questions.

Tell me a little about yourself.

Wrong: My name is Pat Smith and I like long walks on the beach and to play Monopoly. I want to work for your organization because I think you could use some help with your advertising campaigns and I'm much more creative than the team you currently have.

Correct: Mary Birley, Talent Recruiting Consultant at Cargill offered the following insight on the best way to respond to "Tell me about yourself." "The purpose of this question is to make you (the candidate) comfortable and start off the interview by getting to talk about yourself without having to answer a tough question right away." She says to touch on what you're doing in school, some past jobs you've had, some extracurricular activities, and your career goals. She also mentions that it is good to explain how the position you are applying for fits into your career goals.

This question is a hard one for some people because you don't really have an idea how long they'd like you to speak. Take the advice above for your content and try to keep your response between one to two minutes. To wrap up the conversation and turn it back over to the interviewer, share what you feel you can bring to the organization and/or why you are excited about the position.

Are you willing to relocate?

Wrong: It depends on where the location is and if you are willing to pay to help me relocate.

Right: From Human Resources Generalist at Becker Underwood, Kathy Lenz, when responding to this question she is looking for an enthusiastic, but sincere "yes." "There is nothing more frustrating than to go through the whole process and make an offer, only to have the candidate decide they don't want to move after all," says Lenz.

relocate. It will save both parties time.

What is your expected salary range?

Wrong: I'd like to come into the organization at a managerial level, so therefore I think I should be between \$80,000 and \$90,000.

Correct: "This is a very tough question for most people to answer — not just new graduates," shares Shannon Blacker, Human Resources Manager with Syngenta Canada. "The main thing is to come into the inter-



Don't let this situation intimidate you! With a little preparation and practice, you can nail those tough interview questions and make a great impression.

She says that it is also good to hear if the candidate is familiar with the town where the position is or that the candidate has at least researched the area and likes what they've found. Lenz says that tells her that the candidate is serious about the job. Also, she says it is nice to hear questions about the town or area, such as what are the schools like, cost of living, etc. Again, another way to confirm the candidate is serious.

If you are really not willing to relocate, don't apply for the position or if you find out that relocation may be necessary during the interview process, be honest and upfront about the fact that you are unwilling to

view prepared. Do some market research. What are other companies within the industry offering for this type of role? What would similar positions in a different industry pay?"

Blacker advises that most university and colleges have information on typical starting salaries for graduates from each program so use those resources that are available to you.

"Our assumption is that most individuals have an ideal starting salary, valid reasoning behind it and willingness to discuss it," says Blacker. "If you are the top candidate, most companies will want to make you a fair offer that you will be happy with."

Blacker also says, regardless of the actual salary range you propose, it is always a good idea to reassure the hiring manager of the main reasons you have applied and let them know that salary is not your only motivator. Reiterate your interest in the position and the company, and let them know you are confident you could come to an agreement that is fair for both parties should the opportunity be presented to you.

What are your weaknesses?

Wrong: I'm not a morning person, which makes me late for work nearly every day. Also, I have a hard time working with people who don't like my university sports team.

Right: "For answers to this question, we always hear 'I work too hard', or 'I'm a perfectionist', and those are weaknesses that they are trying to make into strengths," Birley says. "Everyone says them, and it is just annoying to hear."

She suggests that it is best to be completely honest and think about the feedback from past employers or co-workers, or just something you know you have to work on.

"A great response to this



With a solid knowledge of what employers are looking for when answering some of those quizzical questions as well as practicing responses to other frequently asked questions you can land your dream job! One point of caution, while it is great to prepare some thoughts to answers for standard questions asked during an interview, you want to be sure that your answers don't seem canned or rehearsed. The point of an interview is to get to know the real you — make sure the employer has the opportunity to do so through your responses to their questions.

question would be to show that you are self-aware in that you know your weaknesses, and then show what you're doing to address them or improve upon them," says Birley.

What will you offer our company?

Wrong: I'm simply the best candidate that you will find and confident in my abilities!

Right: While being confident is important, Lenz suggests that being more specific and providing examples of related experiences or education that relate to the job description and job duties listed are a more valuable response to this question and will help set you apart.

"Tell me why you chose this career path and demonstrate why you have passion for this type of work or position," says Lenz. "Reiterate how you have prepared yourself for this type of work through related education, internships, etc. And, if they don't have the related background yet, I look for an answer that suggests they have carefully thought through this career path and that tells me why they are choosing it."

Do you have any questions for me?

Wrong: No, I think you've answered them all!

Right: "It always amazes me when people do not take the opportunity during the interview to ask questions," says Blacker. "We want

to know that people are just as serious about their careers, as we are about finding the right team member for our organization so we would hope they DO have questions!"

"Similarly, it is a major disappointment for me when the first or only questions a candidate has are: What is the salary? How much vacation would I get? and Can you please describe your health benefits?," says Blacker.

Blacker agrees that those are details that are certainly open for discussion and are great questions to ask at a later stage in the recruitment process if they are not addressed by the hiring manager. Some topics (like vacation and benefits) may even be best discussed during the offer stage.

"My advice is to ask intelligent questions about the role and the company that show you have done your research," says Blacker. "One caveat: limit your questions to three to five for the initial interview as most hiring managers are on a schedule and you don't want to ask too many during the first round. If it is a single interview recruitment process, ask away!"

While we know you would never respond as distinctly wrong as the "Wrong" answers posed within this article, we do hope that the feedback provided directly from the mouths of those who could be hiring you will help prepare you so you are sure to achieve a successful interview and adequately answer some of those quizzical questions.

IMPRESSIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK AN INTERVIEWER

1. Can you describe a typical day in this type of role?
2. How long have you been at the company and what makes you stay?
3. How would you describe the work environment and corporate culture?
4. What are some of the goals for the company in the short and longer term?
5. How would my performance be measured?
6. What types of career opportunities may open up down the road for a person starting out in this type of position, assuming they perform well?
7. What are some of the company's initiatives regarding learning and development?