

Predictable Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.

Said otherwise: *Introduce yourself. Give me an opening statement.*

Example

- *I am a loan officer for a regional bank and have been a top producer for the past five years.*
- *I have been recognized for the ability to analyze information that points to business growth opportunities.*
- *I am comfortable giving presentations on financial responsibility to local civic groups.*
- *Last year I was the project manager for an online application that assists businesses to evaluate alternative forms of capitalization.*
- *I have a BA in Business and have taken 15 post graduate IT credit hours.*

Nearly everyone answers this question by providing a chronological review of his/her career history. Instead, capture the recruiter's attention by reviewing the strengths you defined in your Qualifiers and Differentiators (Tip 6). Doing so transitions the interview to the strongest part of your resume, your Qualifiers and Differentiators—the strengths section. Complete your introduction within two minutes.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2. Tell me about a time you took uncommon initiative or influenced others to do something extraordinary.

Said otherwise: Give me a few examples of personal leadership.

Example

The situation was we normally ship orders within 2-3 days. **The action I took was** to put together a process team that flowcharted the entire process from order received to out-the-door. We found numerous, unnecessary delays and steps. Within 90-days, **the result was** for orders received before 2 pm we were shipping 80% of our products the same day.

Many organizations understand it takes leadership at every organizational level to be successful, even among those individuals in non-managerial roles. How have you demonstrated leadership? Don't overlook activities with community organizations or volunteer groups. Be sure to have additional STARS (See Tip 30) ready to demonstrate accomplishments.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3. What have you done recently to update your skill set or enhance your professional credentials?

Said otherwise: Are you a continuous learner? Have you maintained up-to-date skills or are you in a status quo comfort zone? What is your personal development plan for this year?

Example

I realized I needed to improve my skills speaking in front of others. So I decided to take the Dale Carnegie© course in Effective Speaking. After that, I joined our local Toastmasters© group and have been attending those meetings for over a year now.

Be prepared to speak about professional books you have read, seminars attended, continuing education courses completed, or other self-development activities.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. What are your strengths?

Said otherwise: Do you understand the credentials it takes to be a competitive professional in your field? Are you confident enough in your abilities to tell me about them?

Example

I am the go-to person for most anything related our company's software. I really enjoy having answers and helping others in a way that makes them feel comfortable asking me a question. Because I like being an IT expert in our department I am now studying Microsoft Access through an online program at Lynda.com.

This is the time to sell yourself with confidence. While a certain level of humility is necessary, if you aren't prepared to promote yourself as a candidate, you will have missed a major opportunity to spotlight how you are unique among the pool of candidates.

1. _____
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3. _____

5. What are your weaknesses?

Said otherwise: *Are you self-aware enough to realistically talk about yourself? Are you prepared to provide a candid assessment of your abilities?*

Example

I realize the job posting called for a Bachelor's degree and I still have a two years to go until I finish my degree. Although I may not have all the accounting experience you may need, I have a 3.4 GPA that I have earned while taking six credit hours per semester and working fulltime. I will continue to go to school – and take accounting classes.

Present an honest assessment of a core competency you are working to improve; your answer should be honest, without self-incrimination. Conversely, you can present a strength that you tend to overly rely on to the detriment of your other competencies. Be brief. (This is an example of a question you should not answer on your resume.)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

6. What is the best work environment for you?

Said otherwise: As most organizations and individual assignments include teamwork, such a question is often assessing how well you work with others.

Example

I like opportunities to work with others to make things better. Because of my interpersonal skills, I have a history of being asked to be on process improvement teams. Those teams can point to measurable improvements that never would have been achieved without team collaboration. As a result, I am now a team trainer.

Be prepared with examples of how you collaborated with a fellow employee, worked on a team, or served internal customers. The best examples are ones that demonstrate your willingness to go the extra mile with a cooperative attitude.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

7. Why did you leave _____?

Said otherwise: *I am looking for instances of non-performance, inability to get along with your boss or co-workers, as well as times you may have been terminated with cause.*

Example

Despite excellent performance reviews, which I can show you, the marketplace has not been kind to me. I lost my last two jobs when my companies were acquired and they brought in their own Customer Service Supervisor.

Even if there is nothing in your answers that others may find challenging, it is worth taking the time to script key points of why you left each situation in your career history. ***If anything can be misinterpreted, it will be.*** That is a rule of thumb you especially need to consider as you complete your answer to this question.

(It is a judgment call whether to include this information on your resume. When your employment history is working against you, explaining why things happened as they did can make a huge difference to a recruiter. Again, this does not apply every time, but we have had occasions when such information turns a resume from producing zero interview offers into a resume that produces results.)

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2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

8. Why are you interested in working for this organization?

Said otherwise: Is there a connection here beyond, "I just want a job—any job"? Might what the company does be tied to your interests or personal mission?

Example

The employees I know who work here tell me that everyone seems to care about being part of a team that makes American made products. That sounds like something I could be part of. Definitely.

Be prepared to offer a brief synopsis conveying what you know about the organization and why the organization may rank high on your list of potential employers. Note: an appropriate answer has far more to do with speaking from your heart than from your pocketbook or intellect.

You can prepare to answer this question with general statements of mission or interest preferences.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

9. Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Said otherwise: Convince me you really want this job and aren't just using this opportunity as an entry point into the organization or as a path to a job you really want. Will you be satisfied with this work?

Example

I really don't know about 5 years from now. I just want to do a good job every day. If I do that, when an opportunity presents itself, if the company wants me to move up, I will. I like taking care of today—that gives me confidence that tomorrow will take care of itself.

Yes, most organizations want people who are upwardly mobile, yet an overemphasis on your career horizon may cost you the present opportunity. Never lose sight of the fact that the hiring manager is talking with you because there is a specific job that needs to be done. Of course, career goals are appropriate; yet, your answer should focus on what this position needs and how you can grow your skill set to enable you to take on more responsibilities.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

10. What are your hobbies, extracurricular activities, or community interests?

Said otherwise: How do you choose to spend your free time? How interested are you in serving others? What do you choose to involve yourself in?

Example

I really enjoy being a softball coach for both of my daughter's teams. I love the time I spend with all those kids. And, setting an example as a leader for the parents, who are a bit "too involved" is always a challenge. Yet, I look forward to those challenges because I know it is best for each girl on the team.

In today's competitive employment marketplace, community activities could just be the differentiator that seals or kills the deal. Be prepared to tell employers what you do outside of work and how those skills transfer to the workplace. Provide information that reveals who you are as a genuine person in your resume and certainly in the interview. Don't ever forget, people hire people they know and like. See Tip 32.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

11. What would you like to tell us that we haven't asked?

Said otherwise: Have you been attentive to what we discussed and are you quick enough on your feet to expand upon the critical elements of your candidacy?

Example

My residential experience in project management has been on \$500K+ large project homes and I can lead any skilled trade on site and come in on budget and on time. Couple that with I have now remodeled three homes with my dad – beginning when I was a teenager. Construction is in my blood and I am now ready to move and play with the big boys in commercial construction.

Make the most of this opportunity to re-emphasize your qualifications and uniqueness. Prepare several key statements about yourself that you can consistently choose from and paraphrase for final emphasis at this concluding stage of an interview. These core competencies demonstrate your capabilities. Be sure to have additional STARS (See Tip 30) ready to demonstrate accomplishments.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

12. What final questions do you have for us?

Said otherwise: Did you prepare for this interview? What questions on your list haven't we answered?

Example

My longer-term interest is to live overseas and take an international assignment for a several year period. Can you tell me how many people who are on your engineering team have had such opportunities?

This is the time to ask questions about the job or organization that are important to you. Such questions will help you to understand if an opportunity will bring out the best in you or help you avoid stepping on a career landmine. Prepare by listing questions that will help you to understand the situation you are considering.

This is not the time to ask about salary, benefits, vacation, etc. It is the time to ask about critical projects and priorities. Keep the focus on what you offer—not on what you want to get.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Bonus Questions

- What is the one question about your career history that you hope a recruiter does not ask?
- If we asked your co-workers, what would they say about your performance?

Bonus Question for Managers

- How would your staff describe your leadership style?
- What type of manager do you work best with?
- What is your vision for your department or this organization?