



How to Answer Difficult Interview Questions

Rick Christensen
CAREER DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions



RICK CHRISTENSEN

Director, Career Transition Practice

Career Development Partners



Rick has been a career consultant for over 20 years, serving a very broad-based and diverse clientele. His specialties include effective group facilitation, one-on-one coaching and consultation at all levels including senior executive.

Rick manages all the career transition activities for Career Development Partners, a global provider of world class talent management solutions covering the entire employee life cycle.

His passion is coaching individuals through career transitions, developing career management strategies and in identifying and sharpening competencies to open doors to new opportunities. His efforts have assisted thousands of individuals achieve their full potential.

Rick has achieved the prestigious designation of Certified Master Career Transition Consultant and Certified Life Options Retirement Coach through Career Partners International the world's largest and most successful global talent management consultancy.

Rick is also certified to deliver Manager as Coach Learning Series and Create Your Career GPS.

Previously Rick served as Vice President/Managing Director for a global career transition and organizational consultancy; assisting corporate clients maximize the return on investment in their people.

He has a background in human resources, recruiting, career planning, corporate training and line management in manufacturing. His corporate background includes Emerson Electric, Thomas & Betts Corporation, The HON Company and Baker Hughes. Rick has a passion for creating and developing organizations, participating in two greenfield startups of manufacturing facilities.

Rick is certified to administer and interpret the Birkman, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory and other instruments. He also collaborated on two college level textbooks in human resources.

Contents

Why did you leave (or want to leave) your most recent position?	1
Tell me about yourself	3
What's your greatest weakness?	5
Why do you want to work for this company?	7
Why should we hire you?	9
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	11
Responding to Salary Questions	13
What questions do you have for us?	16
Behavioral Based Interview Questions	18
5 Tough Interview Questions and How to Answer Them	20

Why did you leave (or want to leave) your most recent position?

One of the questions that is usually asked during a job interview is "Why do you want to leave your job?" or "Why did you leave your last position?" if you have already left.

Interviewers like to ask this question because it really reveals a lot about you, such as:

Did you leave this position voluntarily, or were you fired or laid off?

Are you on good terms with the company?

Does your reason for quitting seem valid or reasonable? Your answer offers a window into your on-the-job character and values.

Prepare answers to typical job interview questions, like this one, in advance. Practice your responses so you sound positive, and clear, about your circumstances and your goals for the future.

Tips for responding

There are all sorts of reasons to leave a job. Maybe you want a higher salary, thought the company was in chaos, despised a new manager, or were laid off. Not all of these responses should be shared during a job interview, however. Be honest, but also strategic in your response - avoid any answer that reflects poorly on you. Here are some tips for how to develop a strong response:

Avoid negativity: Do not speak negatively about your former company or colleagues. According to every survey, speaking negatively is the number one turn-off for hiring managers. They assume if you say bad things about your former company you will broadcast bad things about your new company. And frankly, people want to associate with positive people.

Be honest: You don't have to be career suicidal, but you should tell something that reflects the real reason you are leaving. Explain, in positive terms, the reason you left your position, your situation may fit one of these answers:

"I'm looking for a new challenge and to grow my career and I couldn't job hunt part time while working."

"Due to the current economic conditions in the industry the company eliminated many positions, including mine."

"I left my last position in order to spend more time with an ill family member. Circumstances have changed and I'm more than ready for full-time employment again."

"To be honest, I wasn't considering a change, but, a former colleague recommended this job to me and was intrigued by the position and the company. It sounds like an exciting opportunity and an ideal match for my qualifications."



How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

Practice, practice, and practice some more: This is an answer that you want to be prepared for. Don't just go in and "wing it". You want to be honest, but not overly frank, so make sure you have prepared the answer this question in advance. Keep the answer short and unemotional, it is natural to feel awkward talking about these issues, but you want to be sure not to sound defensive.

Final thoughts

Keep this answer short, tell the facts but don't elaborate, you will begin to sound defensive. Interviewers are often more interested in how you react to the question than your answer. Look the interviewer in the eye when you answer. Interviewers are skilled at reading "between the lines" and will note any sign that you are uncomfortable with the answer.

Tell me about yourself

Most interviewers start interviews with the question "Tell me about yourself?" The answer to this question is often included in a hiring authorities' first impression and can often lead to you being either eliminated or screened out in the interview process.

You will be asked this question and need to practice your response so that you are comfortable with your answer. Instead of dreading this question, role-play your response with others and adjust your answer based on the feedback you receive. It's better to be over-prepared than to have your answer sabotage your interview.

I will address the following three topics:

1. What employers look for in your answer
2. How to effectively format your response
3. Great follow up responses



What employers look for in your answer...

The answer to this question has eliminated many qualified job seekers from serious consideration. When you hear this question, you are probably wondering where to begin, and exactly what this hiring authority wants to hear. The answer to this question is much more than a chronological breakdown of your experience. Interviewers are looking for a consistent story that provides an indication that you are a fit for their opportunity.

How to effectively format your response...

You need to answer and convey both of the following:

First: Provide the hiring authority with a sense of who you are and where you're going. Stress why the opportunity you're applying for represents a culmination of your skills, experience and talents acquired from your past employers. You want the hiring authority to realize that your experience to date, has prepared you for the responsibilities and challenges of their position. You can make this point subtly as you answer questions.

Second: Stress specific examples from your previous work experience or education that has prepared you for the opportunity being offered. Focus this part of your answer on your accomplishments and the impact of those accomplishments on past employers.

It is MOST important to Stress the Following:

- Challenges you faced and handled successfully
- Projects you successfully completed
- Past learning experiences that are relevant to this specific opportunity

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

It is effective to show the relevance of your past challenges, or completed projects to your high level of interest in their position. Also stress the confidence you have in your ability to do the job.

Share just enough detail without embellishing. Your answer should not be longer than two minutes, unless the interviewer interrupts you with questions. Your response should be short and concise.

Be careful not to ramble or talk too much. You do NOT want to review every job you've held or why you left past positions. This information will be revealed by the subsequent questions you are asked during your interview.

Great follow-up responses...

Throughout the entire interview you want to position yourself as the perfect person for their opportunity. Your interview is an "audition for a part" not a fact-finding mission. By the end of your interview, you want the hiring authority to feel confident that you can effectively do their job and provide them with a strong return on their investment if you are hired.

If you are asked a question you don't understand, ask for clarification. Your responses should always focus on the WIIFT (what's in it for them) of the hiring authority. It is wise to write down questions in advance that will help uncover the priorities of each person in the interview process.

If you are not asked if you have questions, it is wise to ask the interviewer if you can ask a few questions.

What's your greatest weakness?

The best way to handle difficult interview questions is to prepare for them in advance. Of course, you will never know every question that can come up, but you can know that many questions are common to all interviews. This question seems to be a favorite of most interviewers.

I think there are two reasons an interviewer might ask this question. First, the interviewer may be using



it as a “gotcha” question. Hoping you will reveal something that will eliminate you as a candidate. I prefer to give interviewers the benefit of the doubt and think they are asking for the second reason. They want to know if you are self-aware enough to know you are not good at everything and do you have the initiative to improve that skill.

There are a few ways to answer this question. Let's look at what constitutes a good response – and what doesn't.

Here are some common mistakes...

Denial – No one is good at everything, the interviewer immediately recognizes this as an evasion of the question and while they may not follow-up with probing questions they have identified their perception of your weakness, you are deceptive and may not own up to your mistakes on the job.

Turn a weakness into a strength – I see this advice most often. “I work too hard.” “I'm a perfectionist.” Again, both these answers tend to be disingenuous and unauthentic.

Being flippanant – “chocolate cake” or “kryptonite”, when you answer serious a question like this with a joke you are telling the hiring manager two things. Number one, you don't respect the question enough to give it serious thought (which could lead them to think you also don't respect or take the position seriously enough to warrant being hired) and number two, let's be honest...you just look dumb.

Interviewers are looking for people that are honest and authentic, these answers show just the opposite.

Here is a good way to answer the question...

Even though this question is about weaknesses you need to focus your answer on the positive aspects of your skills and abilities as an employee. The answer should be two parts. First the weakness and second the steps you have taken to improve the skill.

Focus on non-critical skills – Analyze the skills and strengths required for the position you are interviewing for and then come up with an honest shortcoming that is not essential for success in that job.

For example, in a role that does not require public presentations, you might say “I'm naturally a quiet person and have never felt comfortable talking in front of groups. I recognized that this may be a block

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

to future promotion, so I have started attending a weekly Toastmasters meeting; and while I'm not as proficient as I want to be, I have made great progress."

There are several ways this question may be phrased.

- What is your greatest/biggest weakness?
- What do you consider to be your weaknesses?
- On your last performance appraisal what areas were noted for improvement?
- What kind of self-improvement have you done recently?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What would your current boss/co-workers say is your weakest area?
- Tell me about a time you failed.
- Describe a difficult work situation and what you did to overcome it.

A couple of learning points...

You also need to be prepared for the potential of the interviewer asking for a second or even third weakness.

Answering this question takes research into the job and the company, understand what the critical skills are and be sure to not use those as a weakness. There may also be "pet peeves" of the manager that are not in the job description, as part of your research you need to understand those.

Don't over prepare for this answer, it needs to sound unscripted and you may need to adjust the answer based on the flow of the interview.

Most interviewers are more interested in how you answer the question than what you say. They want to know how you handle uncomfortable discussions so your answer should show courage and confidence.

Many interviewers have stopped asking this question because they realize no one is going to reveal their true weakness. Instead of this question they will ask probing behavioral based questions that will give them the information they need to assess your fit with the organization.

Why do you want to work for this company?

“To get a paycheck.”

“It’s a great company and I’d love to work here.”

“Who wouldn’t want to work here.”

“I heard you have great benefits.”

All of these answers may be true, but none of them rise to the level that will get you hired.

The first step in answering this question is asking yourself, why do you want to work there. If all you can come up with are the above answers, then maybe it isn’t the right place for you. I’m sure you want to work with an organization to which you can make a contribution, work with people you respect, have an opportunity to learn and grow.

Start by doing a deep dive into everything that is published about the company, what resonates? When you read it, you say “wow, I want to be part of that”. Now, how can you add value to that part of the company.

Next, talk to current and former employees, what did they like, how did they add value, why do they keep working there?

How to answer

Answering this question, like most answers in an interview, should focus on how you will add value or solve a problem for them, not for what they will do for you.



This answer should be two parts, what you know about them and what value you can add.

The following are good answers that follow this pattern:

“I recently read that the company is considering going public. I feel like my recent experience working at Zylon Corporation during their public offering would fit well with the needs of your company.”

“I saw an article in Business Week about your new CEO John Jacobs and the firm’s renewed focus on technology innovation. I consider myself an innovator and I would love to work for an organization that’s leading the future of the industry.”

“I feel that my proven track record leading multi-functional teams makes me an excellent match for the job requirements. Also, the role excites me because I love the idea of helping to develop cutting-edge software products and I know I could start delivering results from Day 1.”

“I see that your company has targeted growth in such-and-such area. That’s something I know a good deal about, and I believe that I may be able to make a significant contribution by doing A, B and C.”

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

Don't be afraid to weave in some of the mission or values into your conversation. If the company states they have a value of lifelong learning, talk about your commitment to learning and growing.

There are no right or wrong answers to this question. Your answer should reflect that you have thought about what you want and have researched the company. Let the interviewer know you are being selective about where you want to work and you're not just going to take any job offered to you. Demonstrate that this is the company you want to work for—a little flattery will go a long way.

Why should we hire you?

You pray for them to ask this question, it is your home run question. This is the question that will allow you to show how much research you've done, how your skillset matches their needs, demonstrate your understanding of their problems, and your understanding of their problems that you can solve.

Most people aren't used to selling themselves so this answer might be uncomfortable for some to answer. But this is no time for modesty. If you don't toot your own horn, they won't know what you can do for them so it is up to you to sell yourself.

Like most answers in an interview, you will want to focus on their needs rather than your needs. Prior to the interview research, research and more research. You need to know the company inside-out, you should be as knowledgeable about the company as the average employee. You need to know their products, services, successes, failures, future plans, history, market advantages/disadvantages, competitors, absolutely everything you can find about them.



How do you research a company?

- You need to devour every piece of written material you can find. Google the company, read every result. Identify the key leaders, have they written articles, blogs or been quoted in the press. Read competitor's websites and published news.
- Talk to current and ex-employees and talk to competitor's employees, use LinkedIn to find these contacts. Ask specific questions that will give you a broad understanding of the culture. Don't let one bad review spoil the reputation of the company, but do take notice if you get several negatives.

Formulate your answer

- Carefully read the job posting, identify the 3 – 5 key skills they are seeking.
- Begin by writing your PAR stories (Problem, Action, and Results) about accomplishments for each of the skills they are seeking. Detail these stories with plenty of numbers – how much did you improve, how much did you save, etc.
- Find a pain point, what is an issue they are struggling with? How can you solve that issue or how does your experience relate to that issue? Use your PAR stories to illustrate your fit. Help them see you as a valuable team member.

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

Final thoughts

This answer can't be a one size fits all kind of answer, you should tailor it to the specific job and company. And have several prepared, you never know what direction the interview will take once it has started, so you should be flexible and use the stories that match the needs now that you have been able to use more discovery questions.

This answer can be the most critical answer you give, use this answer to shine and prove you are the right selection.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

When you are interviewing for a job, it can be hard to know what you want to do next year let alone what you want to be doing in five years. Even if you have a clear vision of where you want to be, it is important to be careful in how you answer because you will have to tailor your answer to the job for which you are interviewing.

This popular question helps interviewers and hiring managers get a sense of how your career goals align with the company's and whether you are likely to have a long tenure.

There are several wrong answers

"Retired." "Fishing." "One the beach drinking Pina Coladas." "Touring with the Red Hot Chili Peppers." These may be your dreams, but they indicate a lack of commitment to the company and position you are interviewing for.

"Well, I see myself in your seat doing your job." That isn't funny, it's not ambitious. It is a red flag that the interviewer will immediately see – and eliminate you as a serious candidate.

"Hmm, that's a really good question. Let me see, I guess I really hadn't thought much about it." This shows a lack of ambition and direction. An interviewer may interpret this as not having an interest in learning and contributing.



The right answer

Remember you are interviewing for the current position not for a position in five years. So, your answer has to be rooted in today's reality, but also show you have a plan and are interested in your career.

Start by researching the company and the role to identify what the potential career path might be. Is this role clearly defined to be a developmental step? If so what are the next logical steps in the progression, you can talk about those roles.

"My goal is to learn everything there is to know about being the Associate Potato Sorter. As I develop my skills I would like to assume more management responsibilities and become a Lead Potato Sorter managing a crew of sorters. I want to work for an organization where I can build a long-term career"

Sometimes there isn't a clear career path from the position you are interviewing. Emphasize your desire to make a contribution, learn and achieve in the role.

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

"I am driven to be the best at what I do and I want to work somewhere where I'll have opportunities to develop my skills, take on interesting projects and work with people I can really learn from. Some of the most innovative thinkers in the industry work here and that's a big reason why I would love to build a career here."

Nobody wants to hire an applicant who is halfhearted about the job. Your response to "Where do you see yourself in five years?" is your opportunity to sell the interviewer on your commitment to the career path and the position.

Responding to Salary Questions

Ideally, salary should only be discussed when you receive a job offer from an employer because that is when you have the most leverage and bargaining power. Until then, try to deflect the salary discussion until you can learn more about the position and demonstrate your value.

Employers seek salary information to confirm if your expectations are within their range and your answer helps them to “screen you out,” rather than “screen you in.” If you answer this question too soon, and your range doesn’t fit their compensation guidelines you may be eliminated as a candidate.

During an interview, you can maintain your salary negotiating power by addressing the employer’s queries with answers that defer, deflect, or profile salary ranges instead of giving them a specific dollar value.



Deferring salary questions early in the interview process allows you to learn more about the new position:

“I would prefer to learn more about the position and assess how I could contribute to your team before discussing salary.”

“I would like to defer discussing salary until after I can evaluate how my skills and experiences meet your qualifications.”

“While salary is certainly important, it’s just one part of the picture, so my requirements are quite flexible depending upon the rest of the compensation package and the opportunities provided.”

“My sense is that XYZ Company has a fair compensation package. So, if we decide that this position is a good match with my skill set, I’m confident we will be able to agree on a salary.”

Deflecting salary questions gives you greater control and allows you to ask the employer to provide a salary range:

“My research indicates that compensation for this type of position falls in the range of \$ to \$ (use total compensation range – salary plus commissions or bonuses). Is this consistent with your range?”

“My salary expectations are fairly flexible. But I’ve been primarily focusing on positions in the range of \$ to \$. How does that compare with your range?”

“I expect to fit within your compensation range. Can you tell me what it is for this position?”

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

Profiling a salary range:

When the interviewer is unwilling or unable to provide a salary range and pressures you to disclose a specific wage, provide the employer with a ballpark or flexible figure instead of giving them a concrete number. Sharing total compensation (not just salary) will give the employer a more complete picture of your expectations.

“While my requirements are flexible, the positions of most interest to me are in the \$ to \$ range. Of course, salary is just one part of an overall compensation package.”

“I’m not sure my salary history is directly relevant to this (role / industry). But let me share with you that, based on my research of your (industry/company/this role), I’m focusing primarily on positions in the \$ to \$ range. Of course, salary is just one part of an overall compensation package.”

Requests for Past Salary

There is a growing trend among employers not to ask questions about prior salaries, there are even a couple of state and cities that have passed laws prohibiting these questions.

However, if questions concerning your salary history do arise, they should be initially deferred or tossed backed to the employer. If you are pressured to provide an answer, try to redirect the conversation towards your current expectations rather than focusing on your past history, which may or may not be relevant. However, if they persist in inquiring about your previous salary, you could say:

“Based on my research, I believe we are in the same ballpark and I would be happy to discuss salary once we have discussed your requirements and evaluated how I can meet your needs.”

“Actually, the new responsibilities are quite different from my previous position and I would be pleased to fit into your salary structure. Can you share what your salary range is for this position?”

“Though my previous work history is a strong match for this job, I believe that different organizations have varied salary structures. What is your salary range for this position?”

When the interviewer insists that you disclose your past salary you could say:

“Although compensation is certainly important, I’m most interested in this position and the opportunity to contribute to (insert name of company), so I hesitate to let salary influence our discussion. However, at my previous job, my full compensation was in the range of \$-\$, including a benefit package.”

Recruiters – The Exception to the Rule

When working with third party recruitment firms or head hunting organizations you will need to fully disclose your salary expectations to them. This helps them manage expectations for both parties and helps them to ensure that they are presenting you with opportunities in keeping with your requirements. In some cases, they may actually negotiate with employers on your behalf and secure a job offer that meets your expectations. Remember, just as they are familiar with your “flexibility” they are also familiar with that of the hiring organization.

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

Online Applications

Many organizations use their online application systems to “profile” candidates which allows them to do some screening even prior to reading the resumes. If you are offered an option of “Negotiable” or the like, choose that option as you want to remain open to successful negotiations. However, this may not always be an option. As you have seen suggested above, you always want to aim to DEFER, DEFLECT or PROFILE, but unfortunately with online applications you don’t have as many options. It is suggested that, prior to filling out the profile, you do some research using COMPARABLE roles in COMPARABLE industries to see what the market is benchmarking. Also, be sure to source this type of information through networking. When you have a bit of a range in mind (what the market can bear), and if it is in keeping with your needs and expectations, use this information to respond to this type of question. That way you can be surer you are within their scope while keeping within your own.

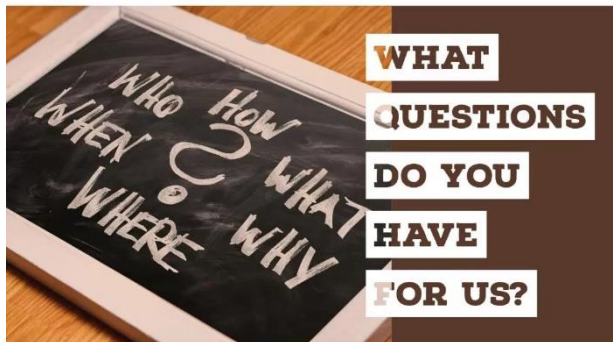
Cover Letters

Revealing salary history or expectations in a cover letter allows potential employers to screen out candidates that disclose a range that is too high or too low. If a posting asks you to include your former salary or current salary expectations, deflect the question and provide research based salary expectation answers or general overall compensation package statements. For application forms, enter the word “negotiable” or “flexible” when asked to state your former or current salary expectations.

What questions do you have for us?

Interviews should always be conversations, except in very structured interviews, you are allowed to ask questions during the interview as they occur. Don't rely on your memory to remember questions so you can ask them at the end of the interview.

The worst answer you can give to this question is "No, I don't have any." The interviewer will interpret this as a lack of interest in the job and company and that you did not do any research that raised a question. Always have questions.



Questions should be thought out before the interview and you should have a written list. We recommend that you have 12 – 15 written questions. You will probably never ask this many, but you need to be prepared. If you have a list of three questions and all three are answered during the interview you will be left scrambling for a question. So always have reserve questions you can ask.

Your questions should generally fall into these categories:

- About the job
 - What can you tell me about this job that isn't in the description?
 - What is the key to success in this job?
 - Why is this position open?
 - What is the biggest challenge someone in the job faces on a daily (or weekly or monthly) basis?
- Getting to know the interviewer
 - How long have you been with the company?
 - Why did you come to this company?
 - What is your favorite (or least favorite) part of working here?
- Management Style
 - Can you describe your management style?
 - How do people that work for you know when they are doing a good (poor) job?
 - How would your employees describe your management style?
- Company culture
 - What is the company and team culture like?
 - How would you describe the work environment here – is the work typically collaborative or more independent?
 - What is your favorite office tradition?
- Performance measurements
 - What metrics or goals will my performance be evaluated against?

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

- What are the most important things you'd like to see someone accomplish in the first 30, 60 and 90 days on the job?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- Future co-workers
 - Can you tell me about the team I'll be working with?
 - Who will I work with most closely?
- Opportunities for growth
 - What is the career path for this position?
 - Is this job open because the person was promoted or let go?
- Moving forward
 - What is the next step in the selection process, when should that occur and who should I follow-up with?
 - Is there anything else I can provide you with that would be helpful?

Bonus Question

This question can sound a bit aggressive to some people but it can allow you to identify any objections the interviewer may have and formulate a response that overcomes the objection.

We have had an opportunity to get to know each other much better, is there anything at this point that gives you any hesitation about my background being a fit for this role?

Questions to stay away from

Any question that you should know the answer to. Do your homework and research before going to the interview, so you should already know about their products, services, history, size all information readily available through normal research.

Questions about pay or benefits, these are reserved for negotiation after the offer is made.

Finally, don't bombard the interviewer with a laundry list of questions. If she seems engaged in the conversation and encourages you to keep asking, great, but if you see her looking at her watch, time to wrap it up! It's best to pick a handful of questions that are most important to you and leave on a positive note.

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

enable you to zero in on the kinds of behaviors the company wants. In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Candidates who tell the interviewer about specific situations that relate to each question will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms.

Ideally, you should briefly describe the situation, what specific action you took to influence the situation, and the positive result or outcome. Frame it in a three-step process, usually called a P-A-R, or S-T-A-R statement:

1. What is the situation (or task, problem) you faced,
2. what specific action did you take in response to the situation,
3. describe in detail what was the result/outcome.

It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Become a great storyteller in your interviews, but be careful not to ramble.

It's difficult to prepare for a behavior-based interview because of the huge number and variety of possible behavioral questions you might be asked. The best way to prepare is to arm yourself with an arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Despite the many possible behavioral questions, you can get some idea of what to expect by looking at behavioral questions.

Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or – better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

Here's a good way to prepare for behavior-based interviews:

- Identify six to eight examples from your experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half of your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use more recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Some companies, in fact, specify that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form using PAR/STAR.

5 Tough Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

As we wrap up our series on difficult interview question, we'll address five questions that may come up and how to answer them.

1. Are you a team player?

Almost everyone answers yes to this question. But it is not just a yes/no question. You need to provide examples to back up your answer.

"Yes, I'm very much a team player. In fact, I've had many opportunities to develop my skills as a team player. For example, on a recent project..."

Emphasize teamwork behavioral examples and focus on your openness to diversity of backgrounds. Talk about the strength of the team above the individual. And note that this question may be used as a lead in to questions around how you handle conflict within a team, so be prepared.

2. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or co-worker? How was it resolved?

Note that if you say no, most interviewers will keep drilling deeper to find a conflict. The key is how you behaviorally reacted to conflict and what you did to resolve it.

"Yes, I have had conflicts in the past. Never major ones, but there have been disagreements that needed to be resolved. I've found that when conflict occurs, it helps to fully understand the other persons perspective, so I take time to listen to their point of view, then I seek to work out a collaborative solution. For example..."

Focus your answer on the behavioral process for resolving the conflict and working collaboratively.



3. If I were to ask your boss or co-workers to describe you, what would they say?

This is a threat of reference check question. Do not wait for the interview to know the answer. Ask any prior bosses or co-workers in advance. And if they're willing to provide a positive reference, ask them for a recommendation on LinkedIn. Then you can answer the question like this:

"I believe she would say I'm a very energetic person, that I'm results oriented and one of the best people with whom she has ever worked. Actually, I know she would say that, because those are her very words. May I show you her letter of recommendation?"

So be prepared in advance with your letters of recommendation.

How to Handle Difficult Interview Questions

4. If you had to live your life over again, what one thing would you change?

Focus on a key turning point in your life or missed opportunity. Yet also tie it forward to what you are doing to still seek to make that change. For example:

"Although I'm overall very happy with where I'm at in my life, the one aspect I likely would have changed would be focusing earlier on my chosen career. I had a great internship this past year and look forward to more experience in the field. I simply wish I would have focused here earlier. For example, I learned on my recent internship..." then provide examples.

Stay focused on positive direction in your life and back it up with examples.

5. What are the qualities you feel a successful manager should possess?

Focus on two words: leadership and vision. Then tell of how that leadership and vision translated into your personal delivered results. Here is a sample of how to respond:

"The key quality in a successful manager should be leadership—the ability to be the visionary for the people who are working under them. The person who can set the course and direction for subordinates, keeping them focused on what is most important for delivering the highest priority results. The highest calling of a true leader is inspiring others to reach the highest of their abilities. I'd like to tell you about a person whom I consider to be a true leader..."

Then give an example of someone who has touched your life and how their impact has helped in your personal development.