



Killer Questions

Interviews are designed to do just one thing; identify the best possible candidate for the advertised job. Sometimes it may feel like the questions being asked have been designed to deliberately catch you out or make you question whether you are up to the job or not. That's not their intention, some questions aim to establish how well you cope under pressure, others will reveal your personality or see what your career aspirations are. Here are some of the toughest interview questions and their suggested responses:

Tell me about yourself

This is perhaps the most open ended questions of them all and is typically used by interviewers as a warm up question to give you the opportunity to shine. Resist the temptation to start talking about your life history. What the interviewer is looking for is a quick two or three minute snapshot of who you are and why you are the best candidate for the job. Keep your response relevant to the position you are applying for:

'I started my media sales career 5 years ago as a telesales representative, rising through the ranks before gaining promotion to sales manager three years later. I am now responsible for training and developing a team of 15 sales consultants that are currently the company's best performing sales team.'

Why should we hire you

This can be a killer question and can make or break your chances of winning the job. How you answer it will depend on how well you have probed your interviewer about their requirements and expectations. What the employer is really asking you is 'What can you do for my business', your response needs to answer that question:

'As I understand your needs, you are first and foremost looking for someone who can increase your advertising sales and has experience of managing a sales team. I have a proven track record in successfully managing and developing my territory within this sector, having increased my sales from £150,000 to £210,000 over the last two years alone.'

If you were a car/tree/animal what would you be

Baffling though it may seem, some interviewers still insist on asking these types of questions. There is no right or wrong answer, the interviewer is simply testing your reactions under pressure to see how you will cope with the unexpected in an attempt to gain an insight into your personality and how you view yourself. Don't get hung up on the implications of your answer, just be mindful that you will be expected to explain your choice, for example:

'I would probably be a 1962 Alpha Romeo Spider – stylish, drive and fast off the mark.'

Why did you leave your last job

You know this question will be asked at some point, so have your answer ready. The rule of thumb is to always remain positive about your current and previous employers because you never know when your paths may cross again; also who are you going to turn to for a reference. For example:

'I learned a lot from my previous employer and enjoyed my time there. However, promotional opportunities were few and far between and I am keen to advance my career sooner rather than later.'

What are your weaknesses

Career manuals are abound with ways to tackle this question. Most of them seem to suggest that you should take one of your strengths and portray it as a weakness, for instance 'I work too much' this will actually work against you rather than for you because it may imply that you do not organize your workload effectively, or that you have poor time management skills. Instead, opt for a genuine weakness, for example:

'I used to struggle to plan and prioritise my workload, however, I have taken steps to resolve this and now I have started using a planning tool and diary system on my laptop.'

What motivates you

Short of telling your interviewer that you are motivated by the prospect of earning a footballers salary, driving a Bentley or having a holiday home in St Tropez, try and give a constructive answer that will excite your interviewer into understanding what benefit you will bring to his business. For example:

'I get a real kick out of seeing my team exceed their sales targets and completing the project on time and in budget.'

How would your former colleagues describe you

This is a sure sign that the interviewer likes you and is already thinking about contacting your previous employer for a reference. This is the time you realize how important it is to choose your referees carefully. Answer this question in the way that you would like to think your employer would respond. For example:

'I have an excellent working relationship with my manager and we have mutual respect for each other. He considers me to be hard working, dedicated, reliable and able to work well using my own initiative.'