

What Should I Say?

How to Handle Tough Interview Questions

By Robert Half International

Wouldn't it be great if you could walk into an interview and hear the hiring manager announce, "Clearly, based on your resume, you're qualified for the job. When can you start?" Of course, the reality is that all candidates go through the interview process. And, in most cases, you will be asked at least a few questions that put your thinking and communication skills to the test.

Here are five tough questions commonly asked by employers and strategies for answering them appropriately:

- 1. Can you tell me about yourself?** Interviewers usually ask this question as an icebreaker at the beginning of the meeting. Keep your response brief and focus on professional goals and interests. For instance, you might note that you've been working in information technology (IT) for five years and, after taking two courses in network security, have decided you'd like to concentrate your work in that specialty. The hiring manager doesn't want to hear your life story, so be careful not to go overboard sharing every detail. Also avoid discussing personal matters; your goal is to reinforce your professional qualifications.
- 2. What are your weaknesses?** Be honest, but focus on shortcomings that are less likely to eliminate you from contention. For example, you might talk about how you tend to get so focused on your projects you fail to socialize with coworkers. Then mention steps you're taking to overcome your weaknesses, such as participating in more department functions to get to know people better and build effective working relationships.

- 3. Why did you leave your last job? Why do you want to leave your current job?** This can be a tricky question if you have left a company on bad terms or have serious issues prompting you to seek a job elsewhere. Try to be diplomatic. For instance, you might note that your employer has no plans to invest in new technologies in the near term. You thrive on the cutting edge, so it wasn't the best environment for you anymore. If you were fired from a job, briefly explain the reason and emphasize what you learned from the situation. Even if you have reasonable grievances with a particular employer, avoid being critical. Be positive, professional and mature.
- 4. Can you tell me about your least favorite manager?** Interviewers ask this question to gain a sense of how you worked with previous supervisors and any issues that might prevent you from getting along with your prospective boss and coworkers. Try to provide a balanced review — one that is neither overly negative nor overly positive — and concentrate on the individual's management style rather than personal differences or conflicts.
- 5. If you could be any animal, what would you be?** These questions can catch you off guard, but try not to read too much into them. The interviewer is looking to test your critical-thinking skills and, more than anything, expects a well-thought-out and honest answer. You're not likely to be eliminated from contention if you say that you would choose to be a dog and the interviewer turns out to be a cat person. However, you may reduce your chances if you failed to listen to the question or take it seriously.

Interviews are a necessary step in the hiring process, but they don't have to be intimidating. Prepare for some common brainteasers in advance and ask for a minute to

consider your answers when faced with particularly challenging topics. Displaying grace under pressure will highlight your professionalism and help you stand out as a candidate.

Robert Half International is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm with a global network of more than 360 offices worldwide. For more information about our professional services, please visit www.rhi.com.

###