

Candidate Chronicles - Make Your First Impression Count - Part II

In the last issue of the Candidate Chronicles, we provided suggestions to help you prepare for your next interview. The following continues our discussion of making your first impression count by examining some of the most common and challenging interview questions.

When a prospective employer conducts an interview, not only are they looking for a particular skill(s) and cultural match, they also are interested in how you think, make decisions and solve problems. The interviewer also wants to learn about your accomplishments and leadership skills. Before your next interview, take a few minutes to write down your answers to the following questions. You will be better prepared to make the most of your interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.

This question inevitably comes up during the interview, although the wording may be different. Knowing this, you should prepare a 30-60 second 'elevator-pitch' about your work and career accomplishments. Stay away from descriptions that are not work related. An employment interview is not the time to tell a prospective employer you have three cats, a frog and play competitive ping-pong on the weekends.

2. Why are you looking to move from your current position?

If you are working with a search consultant, your answer may be that you weren't looking to move, but the opportunity sounded interesting and you would be regretful if you didn't investigate it further.

3. In what areas do you feel you need improvement?

This is the alternative question to, "What are your weaknesses?" We all have areas in which we could use improvement and this question tests your self-insight. Be honest, but don't feel you need to expose all of your imperfections. Refer to the 'action items' section in your last performance review to provide 'safe' answers to that question. That way, if the interviewer speaks with your supervisor he will hear congruent information.

4. Tell me about yourself part 2.

Make sure you are able to justify the information on your resume. Practice by constructing a story about who, what, where, how, when and why for each accomplishment you list. Good interviewers will judge your accomplishments by the details you provide.

5. What do you expect out of this position and your association with our company?

If you have properly researched the position and the company, you should be prepared to give a strong response. Be able to discuss how your background can solve the company's business need(s) and by helping the company, how you will be furthering your career goals.

6. If I were to contact your previous boss, what would he or she say about you?

If the relationship with your boss was a good one, you can be reasonably assured the comments will be positive. If the relationship was less than stellar, this is your time to explain your side of the story. Not every workplace relationship is perfect, however boss bashing is never appropriate. Think about your answer in advance so you won't be caught off guard.

7. Tell me about the people you hired in your last job. How long did they stay with you and how did they work out?

The hiring manager is trying to understand your hiring capabilities as well as management style. If you have hired and managed in the past, be prepared to discuss your failures as well as successes.

8. What do you think about in your job? Where do you spend your time?

This question is actually asking how strategic is your thinking and how well do you utilize time during the day. Be prepared to answer the question with real examples.



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9. Why should we hire you over someone else?

If you don't have a reason why you should be hired, then the employer probably won't see a reason either. Be prepared to explain how your background and skills will contribute to the company's success.

10. What do you think are the misconceptions about you?

The interviewer wants to see not only how you view yourself but also how you believe others view you. Be careful; this is a tricky question.

11. What do you think of your former boss?

This question offers you an opportunity to discuss your boss's best attributes - even if you didn't always see eye to eye. The interviewer will be watching to understand how you deal with and respect authority. If you provide a negative report of your last boss, the interviewer will quickly wonder what you might say about them should they hire you.

If you are properly prepared, an employment interview can be a wonderful opportunity to showcase your skills and accomplishments. Before the interview, make sure you research the company and think about potential interview questions and answers in advance. In doing so, you will be one step closer to getting the offer!