

176 QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

GENERAL

- What do you think I should know about you that would help me to determine if you're the right person for this job?
- What can you offer us that other candidates can't?
- What are your strengths? In what areas would you like to be stronger?
- How successful have you been in your last job [or in school]?
- What did you like best about your last job? Least?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why are you seeking a position with our company?
- What things are most important to you in a job?
- What parts of your last job did you consider to be least important?
- How would you describe your personality?
- Why are you leaving your present job? [Or why did you leave your last job?]
- Looking back, how do you perceive your past employer? Your past boss?
- If I were to talk with your previous boss, what would he or she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Describe what you feel would be an ideal working environment?
- If you had your choice of jobs or companies, where would you land?
- Why haven't you found a new position after so many months?
- What other types of jobs or companies are you considering at this time?
- What are your long-range goals?
- Tell me about your most recent interview.

ADAPTABILITY

- You've been working hard on an assignment or project and someone comes along and tells you to do it a different way. How do you handle that?
- Which supervisors have you found easiest to work with? Hardest? Why?
- What kinds of problems have you experienced in switching from one job to another?
- [Recent Graduate] Going from high school to college is usually a big change. How did you find it?
- [Recent Graduate] Switching from one school to another must have been difficult. What problems did you face? How did you deal with them?

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

- What part of your work gives you the greatest feeling of achievement and satisfaction?
- What part of your work have you found the most frustrating or unsatisfying?
- Why did you choose this particular line of work?
- What are the most important administrative responsibilities you have taken on? How well did you like them?
- Describe a situation in which you had a difficult management problem and how you solved it.
- As a manager, what do you look for when you hire people?
- As a manager, what do you look for when you select people for a particular project or work assignment?
- As a manager, did you ever have to fire someone? If so, what were the circumstances and how did you handle it?
- What do you see as the most difficult task in being a manager?
- How much financial responsibility have you had to account for?
- How many people have you managed on your recent jobs?
- How do you think your subordinates perceive you?
- Where do you relate the best? Up one level, down one level, or with peers?
- How are you best managed?
- How do you go about building a team under you?
- Tell me how your approach to managing people has changed over the past 10 years?
- How would you react if you saw a manager propositioning a subordinate? What would you do?
- How would you react if you heard obscene jokes being told by another manager? What would you do?
- If managing was a continuum between growing people and getting a job done, where would you place yourself?

ANALYSIS

- Describe a project or idea you originated in the last year. How did you know it was a good idea?
- What do you do to keep informed about possible work-related problems and issues?
- Have you ever recognized a problem or opportunity before anyone else? What happened?

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

- Have you ever had an experience in which you paid attention to some detail that others had missed? Describe the situation.
- Did you ever find an error in your own work? How did it happen? What did you do about it?

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- Did you ever have to get your point across to different types of people? How did you approach it?
- Suppose you have to explain a complicated procedure to someone who was new. How would you do it?
- Has anyone ever done something wrong after you gave them instructions on how to do it right? How do you think that happened?
- Did you ever have to make a decision based mostly on information you obtained by asking other people questions? Describe how you went about it.
- How do people react when you ask them questions? How well do they seem to understand what it is that you're asking?
- Can you give an example of a time when you had to try to convince your superiors or coworkers about the benefits of something that you were proposing? How did you do it? What were the results and why do you think things went that way?
- Have you done any public speaking? How did you go about preparing? How did your presentation go?
- How would you go about explaining the features of our products or services to a customer who had difficulty understanding them?

CONTROL

- How do you keep track of things that require your attention?
- Describe a typical staff meeting that you attend where you work (or last worked).
- How do you keep track of the assignments you give to your subordinates?
- How do you go about evaluating their performances?
- What do you do when you determine that one of your subordinates is not meeting your standards?
- How would you handle a performance problem with your best employee? With your worst employee?

MAKING DECISIONS

- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year? What made it difficult?
- Describe a problem you had to face recently at work. What did you do to deal with it?
- Are there times when you feel you make your mind up too quickly? Too slowly?
- What do you do when you're in the position of having to make a difficult decision and you're not quite sure which way to go?
- Have you ever delayed a decision so you would have more time to think about it? Give an example.

DELEGATION

- Describe how you usually go about assigning work to subordinates.
- Who is in charge when you are out? How do you let this person know what you expect of them and what their limits and responsibilities are?
- Have you ever been promoted to a position where you had to supervise former peers? How did you handle it?
- Describe a project that required a major effort by many members of your staff. Who did you choose to participate? Why did you choose them? How did you go about making the assignments?
- Have you ever had a situation where you delegated a responsibility, but the work wasn't up to your expectations? Why do you think that happened? What would you do differently next time?

FLEXIBILITY

- Have you ever had the experience where you failed to see an idea or gain cooperation the first time, but succeeded later? What made the difference?
- Tell me about a time when you had to overcome an obstacle in order to reach a goal. What was the problem and what did you do about it?
- Was there ever an occasion when your first approach to something didn't work and so you had to try something different? Tell me about it.
- What different types of people do you deal with? What approach do you use with each?

INDEPENDENCE

- What's an example of a project you've undertaken, even though you knew it would not be popular with everyone? What was the result?
- What were your limits of authority in your last job? Did you ever have to go beyond them? When?
- It's possible, of course, to be loyal to your employer but to disagree with some rules or policies. Can you give any examples from your own experience?
- In what types of situations did you feel it necessary to consult with your boss before taking some action? When did you feel it proper to act on your own?
- How much supervision do you feel that you need in order to work comfortably?

INITIATIVE

- Can you give an example of a time when you did more than was required of you?
- Can you give an example of a time when your effort helped to carry out some project or idea?
- What types of things have you done to make your own job easier or more rewarding?
- What types of things have you done to make your subordinate's jobs easier or more rewarding?
- What types of things have you done to make your group work more smoothly and efficiently?
- Describe a situation where you discovered you had a serious problem. How did you go about solving it?
- What do you do differently from other people in your occupation? In your workplace?
- [Recent Grads:] How often did you take on extra credit projects in your school courses? Describe a few of them.
- [Recent Grads:] Did you ever develop any new ideas or make suggestions in your school or social activities? Describe a few of them.
- If you were the successful candidate for this position, what changes would you make in your organization?
- What motivates you the most?
- Give one or two examples of your creativity.
- How do you reward yourself for working hard?

INTEGRITY

- Can you give an example of a time you found it necessary to "bend" or make an exception to the rules in order to get something done?
- Do you feel some rules should be obeyed more stringently than others? Give me some examples.
- How strictly do you believe your coworkers normally follow the rules? Do you approve of their attitude?
- Have you ever been in a situation when you felt you could accomplish an important goal if you "stretched" a little the information you gave to others? What did you do? What was the result?
- Have you ever believed that a superior or coworker was doing something wrong but you were afraid to confront them or to bring the matter to the attention of others? What did you do?
- What was the most difficult ethical decision you have made and what was the outcome?

JUDGMENT

- What was the best decision you ever made? How did you go about making it? What were the alternatives?
- How about the worst decision you ever made? Tell me the same things.
- What was the hardest decision you ever made?

LEADERSHIP

- Have you ever introduced a new idea or process that was different from the regular way of doing business? How did you go about getting cooperation? What were the results?
- What did you do to help your subordinates set performance objectives last year?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to help a subordinate solve a problem or meet an objective.
- Give examples of times when you were a leader.
- What important trends do you see coming in our industry?

LEARNING ABILITY

- Have you ever had trouble learning a new machine or process? How did you deal with it?
- How long did it take you in your previous job before you felt comfortable with the company's products or services?
- What did you have to learn to be effective in your last job? How long did it take? What parts were the most challenging?
- [Recent Grads:] What were your strongest courses in school? Your weakest? Did you take _____ (subject)? How well did you do?
- What did you find easiest to learn about your last employer's products/services?
- How did you gain the knowledge you needed to do your job?
- How long did you have to study before you took your occupational licensing exam? How many times did you take the test?

LISTENING ABILITY

- Tell me about a situation at your last job when you had to rely on verbal information from someone else in order to get your job done?
- Have you ever had a time when you misunderstood someone else's instructions? Why do you think that happened?
- Have you ever had a hard time with a customer because you had trouble understanding exactly what it was that they wanted? Why do you think this happened? What did you do in the situation?

COOPERATION WITH THE REST OF THE COMPANY

- What other departments did you normally work with in your last job?
- How did the things going on in your department affect other parts of the company?
- Give me an example of a problem you would have that would affect more than just your department? How did you try to solve it?
- What other departments were most useful in providing information or helping you with problems? Least useful?
- When setting goals for your department, what contacts did you make with other departments?

ABILITY TO PERSUADE

- What was the best idea that you ever sold to a superior? To a co-worker? To a subordinate? How did you do it?
- What was the best idea that you couldn't manage to sell? What do you think the problem was? What would you do differently now?

PLANNING / TIME MANAGEMENT

- Describe your typical work week. How did you plan the week's activities? How well did your schedule work?
- Tell me about a time when your schedule was thrown for a loop. What did you do?
- How do you set your priorities?
- Has your department ever experienced a severe backlog or the threat of one? How did you deal with it?
- How do you develop short range plans for your organization? Long range plans?
- Has there ever been a time when your department was in danger of going over budget? What did you do about the situation?
- What were your goals for last year? How did you achieve them?
- [If sales] Describe a typical sales trip. How do you decide which prospects/customers to contact?
- Tell me about an objective in your last job which you failed to meet and why.

RESILIENCE

- Tell me about a time when you suffered a major disappointment. How did you deal with it?
- How does it affect you when someone turns you down?
- How does it affect you when several people turn you down?
- Describe the biggest sale you ever lost. How did you respond?
- Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?
- What have you learned from your mistakes? Give me an example.

SAFETY

- What are the major safety requirements of your job?
- Do these requirements sometimes interfere with your performance? What do you do about it?
- Have you recently seen someone else doing a job in an unsafe manner? Why did you notice? What did you do?
- Have you recently had an accident or a close call? Why do you think it happened?

ABILITY TO SELL

- Describe one of your toughest sales experiences. How did you deal with the problem? Did you make the sale?
- What do you think has been the biggest improvement in your sales ability in the last year? To what do you attribute the improvement?
- Describe a typical sales encounter. Exactly what would you say to convince a customer to buy?

ABILITY TO HANDLE STRESS

- Under what conditions do you do your best work?
- What kinds of conditions do you find the most difficult?
- What kinds of pressure are you under in your job? How do you cope with them?
- What frustrates you the most?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were under particularly great pressure. How did you handle it? How successful were you?
- Do you often take work home? Why?
- Tell me about a work situation that irritated you.
- How do you show your anger and frustration?

TECHNICAL ABILITY

- Tell me about a difficult assignment or project you worked on. What was your role? What did you do?

- Have you received any commendations for your performance?
- Your application says that you have operated a PC. Describe a couple of projects that you have used it for.

TECHNICAL / PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- What do you think is the most important development in your field today? What impact do you think it will have?
- How do you keep informed about what's happening in your field?
- To what job-related organizations do you belong? What is your involvement?
- What job-related publications do you normally read?
- Have you recently attended any conferences or seminars in your field? What did you get out of them?

WORK STANDARDS

- How would you define a good job in your line of work?
- What performance standards do you set for yourself? What have you done to meet them? What do you do if you find yourself falling short of a standard?
- How do you go about meeting deadlines? Give me an example of what you had to do to get a project or report done on time.
- When you evaluate your own performance, what factors do you consider to be most important?
- Do you think your department has been able to contribute as much to the company as you had hoped? Why or why not?
- What do you feel makes a good employee's performance different from a superior employee's performance?
- What do you consider most important in judging a subordinate's performance?

COMMUNICATING IN WRITING

- What are some of the most important things you have written? What challenges did you have writing them? How were they received?
- What has been your most difficult writing assignment recently? What made it difficult? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever written instructions for others to follow, such as customers or employees? What did you write?
- Think about an important report that you had to write. Tell me how you went about planning, organizing, and writing it.
- What is your typical reading audience when you are writing something? What level of language do you use?
- Have you ever written technical manuals or materials for non-technical people? Can you give an example? How did you go about writing it?