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INTERVIEW ADVICE:

You have submitted your CV, made it through the initial screening process, now you are ready for the interview. With so much competition in the job market, this is your opportunity to demonstrate you are the best person for the position. The way you handle yourself during the interview is only one of several factors that ultimately determines whether you get the job, but it is one of the most important nonetheless.

The good news is, you can generally prepare in advance for questions you may be asked. The following are some typical interview questions and some insights on what a hiring manager may be looking for in your answers.

At a basic level most interviews will head off down one of two paths.

- They will begin with the interviewer describing the job and the organisation to you, before asking you to talk about yourself. This type has the advantage of allowing you time to settle down and get a feel for the personality of the interviewer(s). The disadvantage lies in the possibility of new information emerging on which you might be expected to answer questions.
- The interviewer will put you 'on stage' straight away by asking you what attracted you to the position and why you would be a suitable candidate. This approach requires you to make an immediate impact and to talk without the benefit of an established rapport. On the up side, it gives you two chances to 'sell' yourself at the start of the interview and again at the questions stage.

During the interview

- Learn all your achievements from your CV and be prepared to elaborate on them, make sure you have all your facts and figures clearly at hand.
- Be fluent and confident about describing yourself
- You are not boasting, merely stating quantifiable facts about what you have to offer, based on proven achievements and future potential.
- Be enthusiastic about your career and what you have achieved, but avoid unnecessary detail.
- Never interrupt - even where the question is obvious, wait for the interviewer to finish before your reply.
- Listen actively, there is always something more to learn about the organisation and on which you might capitalise.
- Always use positive language to describe your past career history and never criticise former employers, bosses or colleagues - it will simply mark you down as disloyal.

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Answering interview questions

When practicing interview questions and answers, try and think of examples you could use to describe how you have dealt with different situations. Here are some examples of how to answer common interview questions.

Tell me about yourself

This is the ice-breaker of the interview world, and it's always a challenge to answer because it's so broad. The best approach is to narrow the scope of the question by focusing on those aspects of your background that make you qualified for the position. From there, you can talk about your interest in this particular job and company.

Tell me about your last job

Most interviewers are looking for a direct link between your responsibilities in your most recent position and the job they have open. This is your chance to highlight your transferable skills and talk about specifics, including who you reported to, the number of people you managed, how your position fit into the company's big picture and the contributions you made. Make sure you aren't general in your answers. Tell the interviewer what your job entailed day to day and how those responsibilities have prepared you for the current position you're seeking.

Why did you leave your last job?

Stay positive regardless of the circumstances. Never refer to a major problem with management and never speak ill of supervisors, co-workers or the organization. If you do, you will be the one looking bad. Keep smiling and talk about leaving for a positive reason such as an opportunity, a chance to do something special or other forward-looking reasons.

What experience do you have in this field?

Speak about specifics that relate to the position you are applying for. If you do not have specific experience, get as close as you can.

Do you consider yourself successful?

You should always answer yes and briefly explain why. A good explanation is that you have set goals, and you have met some and are on track to achieve the others.

What do co-workers say about you?

Be prepared with a quote or two from co-workers. Either a specific statement or a paraphrase will work. Jill Clark, a co-worker at Smith Company, always said I was the hardest workers she had ever known. It is as powerful as Jill having said it at the interview herself.

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What do you know about this organization?

This question is one reason to do some research on the organization before the interview. Find out where they have been and where they are going. What are the current issues and who are the major players?

What have you done to improve your knowledge in the last year?

Try to include improvement activities that relate to the job. A wide variety of activities can be mentioned as positive self-improvement. Have some good ones handy to mention.

Are you applying for other jobs?

Be honest but do not spend a lot of time in this area. Keep the focus on this job and what you can do for this organization. Anything else is a distraction.

Why do you want to work for this organization?

This may take some thought and certainly, should be based on the research you have done on the organization. Sincerity is extremely important here and will easily be sensed. Relate it to your long-term career goals.

Do you know anyone who works for us?

Be aware of the policy on relatives working for the organization. This can affect your answer even though they asked about friends not relatives. Be careful to mention a friend only if they are well thought of.

What kind of salary do you need?

A loaded question. A nasty little game that you will probably lose if you answer first. So, do not answer it. Instead, say something like, that's a tough question. Can you tell me the range for this position? In most cases, the interviewer, taken off guard, will tell you. If not, say that it can depend on the details of the job. Then give a wide range.

Are you a team player?

You are, of course, a team player. Be sure to have examples ready. Specifics that show you often perform for the good of the team rather than for yourself is good evidence of your team attitude. Do not brag, just say it in a matter-of-fact tone. This is a key point.

How long would you expect to work for us if hired?

Specifics here are not good. Something like this should work: I'd like it to be a long time. Or As long as we both feel I'm doing a good job.

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Have you ever had to fire anyone? How did you feel about that?

This is serious. Do not make light of it or in any way seem like you like to fire people. At the same time, you will do it when it is the right thing to do. When it comes to the organization versus the individual who has created a harmful situation, you will protect the organization. Remember firing is not the same as layoff or reduction in force.

What is your philosophy towards work?

The interviewer is not looking for a long or flowery dissertation here. Do you have strong feelings that the job gets done? Yes. That's the type of answer that works best here. Short and positive showing a benefit to the organization.

If you had enough money to retire right now, would you?

Answer yes if you would. But since you need to work, this is the type of work you prefer. Do not say yes if you do not mean it.

Have you ever been asked to leave a position?

If you have not, say no. If you have, be honest, brief and avoid saying negative things about the people or organization involved.

Explain how you would be an asset to this organization

You should be anxious for this question. It gives you a chance to highlight your best points as they relate to the position being discussed. Give a little advance thought to this relationship.

Why should we hire you?

Point out how your assets meet what the organization needs. Do not mention any other candidates to make a comparison.

Tell me about a suggestion you have made

Have a good one ready. Be sure and use a suggestion that was accepted and was then considered successful. One related to the type of work applied for is a real plus.

What irritates you about co-workers?

This is a trap question. Think real hard but fail to come up with anything that irritates you. A short statement that you seem to get along with folks is great.

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What is your greatest strength?

Numerous answers are good, just stay positive. A few good examples:

Your ability to prioritize, Your problem-solving skills, Your ability to work under pressure, Your ability to focus on projects, Your professional expertise, Your leadership skills, Your positive attitude.

What are your weaknesses?

This one can be the bane of the interviewee's existence. After all, it's difficult enough admitting your downfalls to those you know well, much less someone whom you've just met. This isn't the time to beat yourself up: don't talk about all those projects you started but didn't have time to finish at your last job. Instead, be candid and brief. Maybe planning wasn't your strong suit in the past, but you've found an organisational system that keeps you on track

Tell me about your dream job.

Stay away from a specific job. You cannot win. If you say the job you are contending for is it, you strain credibility. If you say another job is it, you plant the suspicion that you will be dissatisfied with this position if hired. The best is to stay generic and say something like: A job where I love the work, like the people, can contribute and can't wait to get to work.

Why do you think you would do well at this job?

Give several reasons and include skills, experience and interest.

What are you looking for in a job?

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What kind of person would you refuse to work with?

Do not be trivial. It would take disloyalty to the organization, violence or lawbreaking to get you to object. Minor objections will label you as a whiner.

What is more important to you: the money or the work?

Money is always important, but the work is the most important. There is no better answer.

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What would your previous supervisor say your strongest point is?

There are numerous good possibilities:

Loyalty, Energy, Positive attitude, Leadership, Team player, Expertise, Initiative, Patience, Hard work, Creativity, Problem solver

Tell me about a problem you had with a supervisor

Biggest trap of all. This is a test to see if you will speak ill of your boss. If you fall for it and tell about a problem with a former boss, you may well be below the interview right there. Stay positive and develop a poor memory about any trouble with a supervisor.

What has disappointed you about a job?

Don't get trivial or negative. Safe areas are few but can include:

Not enough of a challenge. You were laid off in a reduction Company did not win a contract, which would have given you more responsibility.

Tell me about your ability to work under pressure.

You may say that you thrive under certain types of pressure. Give an example that relates to the type of position applied for.

Do your skills match this job or another job more closely?

Probably this one. Do not give fuel to the suspicion that you may want another job more than this one.

What motivates you to do your best on the job?

This is a personal trait that only you can say, but good examples are:

Challenge, Achievement, Recognition

Are you willing to work overtime? Nights? Weekends?

This is up to you. Be totally honest.

How would you know you were successful on this job?

Several ways are good measures:

You set high standards for yourself and meet them. Your outcomes are a success. Your boss tells you that you are successful

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Would you be willing to relocate if required?

You should be clear on this with your family prior to the interview if you think there is a chance it may come up. Do not say yes just to get the job if the real answer is no. This can create a lot of problems later on in your career. Be honest at this point and save yourself future grief.

Are you willing to put the interests of the organization ahead of your own?

This is a straight loyalty and dedication question. Do not worry about the deep ethical and philosophical implications. Just say yes.

Describe your management style.

Try to avoid labels. Some of the more common labels, like progressive, salesman or consensus, can have several meanings or descriptions depending on which management expert you listen to. The situational style is safe, because it says you will manage according to the situation, instead of one size fits all.

What have you learned from mistakes on the job?

Here you have to come up with something or you strain credibility. Make it small, well intentioned mistake with a positive lesson learned. An example would be working too far ahead of colleagues on a project and thus throwing coordination off.

Do you have any blind spots?

Trick question. If you know about blind spots, they are no longer blind spots. Do not reveal any personal areas of concern here. Let them do their own discovery on your bad points. Do not hand it to them.

If you were hiring a person for this job, what would you look for?

Be careful to mention traits that are needed and that you have.

Do you think you are overqualified for this position?

Regardless of your qualifications, state that you are very well qualified for the position.

How do you propose to compensate for your lack of experience?

First, if you have experience that the interviewer does not know about, bring that up: Then, point out (if true) that you are a hard working quick learner.

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What qualities do you look for in a boss?

Be generic and positive. Safe qualities are knowledgeable, a sense of humour, fair, loyal to subordinates and holder of high standards. All bosses think they have these traits.

Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a dispute between others.

Pick a specific incident. Concentrate on your problem solving technique and not the dispute you settled.

What position do you prefer on a team working on a project?

Be honest. If you are comfortable in different roles, point that out.

Describe your work ethic.

Emphasize benefits to the organization. Things like, determination to get the job done and work hard but enjoy your work are good.

What has been your biggest professional disappointment?

Be sure that you refer to something that was beyond your control. Show acceptance and no negative feelings.

Tell me about the most fun you have had on the job.

Talk about having fun by accomplishing something for the organization.

Do you have any questions for me?

Always have some questions prepared. Questions prepared where you will be an asset to the organization are good. How soon will I be able to be productive? What type of projects will I be able to assist on? are examples.

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Asking questions

Questions provide your final opportunity to sell yourself to the interviewer(s). Use this opportunity to find out more about the organisational structure, your prospective role in it, the nature of the job, the challenge it offers and its career potential. If you feel that you will not remember all the things you need to ask, write them down and ask if the interviewer minds if you refer to your notes. Remember to limit the time spent on questions because the panel will be irritated if you appear too demanding and throw the interview schedule off too much

Additional Interview Tips

Do:

- Dress appropriately adhering to the interviewing company's dress code
- Make sure your cell phone is switched off
- Be a good listener
- Use the interviewer's name
- Make eye contact
- Remember your CV details
- Answer questions directly and specifically and avoid long pauses
- Display confidence in your past achievements
- Ask questions that reflect preparation and logical thinking
- Remember interviewers have to convince you that you should join a company just as much as you need them to employ you.

Don't:

- Chew gum
- Be aggressive or arrogant
- Give only yes or no answers to questions
- Criticise past or present employers
- Read documents that are on the interviewers desk
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Smoke before your interview
- Volunteer your weaknesses

A successful interview relies partly on thorough preparation and partly on thoughtful response to questions on the day. In addition, you can demonstrate a lot to your interviewers with your own questions and effective follow-up.