

How to Answer the Toughest Interview Questions

You know they're coming! Those seemingly unanswerable questions that pop up during interviews. You can't calm up. And you don't want to stammer. So what's a job seeker to do?

The Future Question

Otherwise known as the "big picture" question, the future question goes something like this: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

The best tactic: Talk about your value.

Don't get too detailed about your specific career plan. Instead, discuss things that are important to you professionally and how you plan to achieve them. If growth is a goal, mention that. You can also talk about challenge, another value that employers prize in their employees.

The Salary Question

Most people will tell you that whoever first answers this question first loses. But that's not necessarily true.

When an interview asks your salary requirement, try first to gently deflect the question by inquiring about the salary for the position.

If the interviewer asks you why they should hire you, you're going to have spoken confidently and honestly about your abilities. But you should avoid sounding overly boastful.

The bottom line: The salary question is one of the most important, so you should prepare for it in advance and plan what to say.

The Why Question

There's a fine line between boastful and confident. And you need to learn it.

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Aim for earnest and prepare by practicing. That's right. Stand in front of the mirror and acknowledge your abilities and accomplishments to your reflection. Tell yourself: I have a strong work ethic. I have integrity. I have excellent industry contacts. I aggressively pursue my goals.

It's sometimes hard to praise yourself, but after a few sessions you'll sound sincere.

The Seemingly Silly Question

If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be? What if you were a car? Or an animal?

These types of questions can bring your interview to a screeching halt.

First, don't panic. Pause and take a deep breathe. Then remind yourself that there are no "right" answers to these questions. The job isn't hinging on whether you choose to be spruce versus oak.

Interviews usually ask these questions to see how you react under pressure and how you handle the unexpected. It's not so important what type of tree (or car, or animal) you choose as that you explain your choice in a way that makes you look favorable.

So, be a spruce – because you want to reach the heights in your career. Or be an oak – because you plan to put down roots at the company. Either way, you'll get it right.