

How to answer *hard* interview questions



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*...and everything else you need
to know to get the job you want*

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howtobooks

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Imagine your delight, constant reader, when two weeks later you receive on lovely headed paper an invite to attend an interview for this potentially wonderful new job! That's when your hard work really begins. In Chapter 2 I will explore what you need to be thinking about before you actually attend the interview.

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CHAPTER 2

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Unlike preparing for a sporting event, you can never over-prepare before you go for an interview. You will never 'leave your game on the training ground'. Think of each minute you spend in preparing as an investment in your potential career. To use a well-worn phrase: 'Fail to prepare, then prepare to fail'.

When should you start preparing? Assuming that you did at least some preliminary research when you first decided to apply for the job, as soon as you receive the letter inviting you to interview! In order to prepare properly in terms of research on the organisation and analysis of yourself, you need to set aside time where you can be focused and free of interruptions.

You would be extremely lucky to attend an interview completely unprepared and sail through by a combination of your sparkling personality and incisive wit (which no doubt you DO possess).

Remember, there are no second chances, no retakes in a real-life interview situation. You have to be on top of your game and be prepared to respond to questions you may find difficult and to talk about yourself in highly personal terms. This is not the time to hide your light under a bushel! The reality is that this is a selling exercise. You are selling yourself from the moment you submit that application form or post your CV.

can anticipate future customer needs; goes the extra mile for the customer; takes responsibility for developing long-term relationships with customers; forges partnerships that contribute to future growth opportunities for both customer and own organisation.

Decision-making skills and judgement

Defined as: *The individual can demonstrate a readiness to make high-quality decisions based on the information to hand using logic and analytical skills; breaks complex issues into component parts; considers the outcomes of varying courses of action; can draw reliable conclusions from disparate and often conflicting sources of data; can make sound decisions in a timely manner; is able to make decisions with an awareness of the political climate internally.*

Influencing skills

Defined as: *The individual demonstrates competence in convincing others or impresses them in such a way as to gain acceptance, agreement or behaviour change; sets a positive example by modelling behaviour; has excellent listening, oral and written communication skills; has the ability to influence peers, subordinates and superiors and key decision-makers; can influence at tactical and strategic levels.*

Development of self and others

Defined as: *The individual demonstrates an interest in the development of others as well as himself; seeks out opportunities to learn new skills; encourages others in their development; accepts coaching and mentoring responsibilities; monitors own and others' skill levels; keeps abreast of development in their chosen field.*

Teamworking skills

Defined as: *The individual demonstrates an ability to work cooperatively and productively with others; copies the teamworking styles of others;*

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Level 3 – can accept change and is flexible and applies sustained energy in order to adapt to new requirements.

Demonstrated by:

- Can articulate the need for business change to move the business forward.
- Creates an environment in which peers and subordinates can achieve challenging objectives.
- Remains positive in the face of setbacks.
- Seeks to find answers, not problems.

Level 4 – displays tenacity in the face of unforeseen circumstances and difficulties.

Demonstrated by:

- Understands internal politics and interpersonal sensitivities and differing agendas.
- Takes on enthusiastically new challenges and tasks.
- Is an effective planner and maximises the use of everyone's time who is involved.
- Goes above and beyond what is needed to get the job done.
- Is not afraid of taking calculated risks.

Level 5 – Models drive and resilience and leads by example.

Demonstrated by:

- Is single minded in achieving objectives.
- Is driven by objectives and targets the majority of people could not deliver.
- Tracks the progress towards the achievement of objectives.
- Displays passion in their role.
- Demonstrates commitment to the company and acts as an ambassador at all times.

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Level 4 – focuses on profitability and contribution to increase competitiveness.

Demonstrated by:

- Capable of managing cost or profit centres.
- Uses commercial judgement to enhance growth opportunities.
- Can assess market trends and has the capability to make decisions which will enhance organisation's ability to compete.
- Understands the underlying issues affecting the performance of the business or organisational unit.

Level 5 – applies financial strategies and tactics in the wider context

Demonstrated by:

- Understands acquisitions, mergers and divestments.
- Develops creative new financial and commercial strategies to enhance growth.
- Confidently communicates messages from company financial documentation such as profit and loss accounts, balance sheets, etc.
- Benchmarks against others in order to seek commercial advantage.
- Uses external sources to keep informed of competitors' actions/developments.

Leadership of change

Level 1 – can successfully adapt to changing conditions and circumstances.

Demonstrated by:

- Endeavours to be resilient in situations which may appear unclear or contradictory.
- Shows a willingness to broaden skills and try alternative work.
- Understands the need for progressive change.
- Can adapt quickly and successfully to change.
- Assimilates new ways of working well.

Level 2 – markets self and others for opportunities for development; recognises others' career aspirations and supports them.

Demonstrated by:

- Regularly asks for feedback on own performance.
- Is aware of what is required to achieve career ambitions.
- Gets actively involved in developing others.
- Does not prevaricate and makes things happen for themselves.
- Consistently tries to develop current skill set.

Level 3 – continually improves the capability of the organisation through contributing to a learning culture.

Demonstrated by:

- Gives practical feedback to others.
- Mentors and coaches others to achieve their full performance capabilities.
- Takes direct accountability for success or failure of subordinates.
- Sees the appraisal system as an excellent way to identify training needs for self and others.
- Ensures training needs analyses results are acted upon.

Level 4 – actively addresses career development and pushes for the achievement of career plans.

Demonstrated by:

- Is pragmatic about one's own strengths and weaknesses and how best to get the results needed.
- Gives practical guidance and support to others in achieving their career ambitions.
- Recognises more subtle talents in others and actively encourages the development of these talents.
- Conducts the appraisal process in a professional and thorough manner.
- Looks for opportunities to 'stretch'.

Level 5 – measures and monitors skill levels throughout the organisation with an eye on future needs.

Demonstrated by:

- Keeps abreast of developments outside immediate area of expertise.
- Makes sure others get the resources they need to deliver what is expected of them.
- Is intuitive about people; takes informal and creative risks with them.
- Maximises the potential of the organisation's human capital.
- Strives to be an employer of choice by demonstrating commitment to people development.

Team working skills

Level 1 – is an effective team member.

Demonstrated by:

- Works effectively with others in a team.
- Requests help, or offers support when required.
- Cooperates with other team members and has a flexible and open-minded approach.
- Projects a positive image of teamworking.

Level 2 – Develops effective and supportive relationships with colleagues.

Demonstrated by:

- Draws on each team member's particular talents to maximise the effectiveness of the team.
- Contributes to the running of the team.
- Shares ideas and data with team members.
- Can work across team boundaries.
- Aware of the strengths and development needs of other team members.

many of us, this is lazy research. Unimaginative and predictable. I will expand on this in Chapter 6 on questions and answers later on.

So what should you do? Using what you have gleaned about the organisation as a starting point, see if you can find out who their competitors are and what they have to say on their websites.

It is much better to answer an interviewer in response to the question 'What do you know about us?' with a brief summary of what you've learned followed by your own question such as '... however, I see that Company XYZ is also expanding into the Pacific Rim market in direct competition with yourselves. How do you see that battle going?'

It is a golden rule when researching or compiling data on any subject not to suffer from 'paralysis by analysis'. You must react to what your research tells you.

EXAMPLE

You are going for a job with a company which manufactures parts for the production of cigarettes. Your research tells you that you the company has enjoyed growth over the past 20 years and shows no sign of declining. However, the recent introduction of anti-smoking legislation in the UK has made you think that this company must be doing something right in order to continue growing. You dig around some more and find that in the UK smoking is actually in decline through a combination of the new legislation and through greater awareness of health issues by the general public. Ergo, the only reason the company can still be growing is because they are selling outside of the UK.

You do some more searching and find that the world's growth markets are India, China and other 'developing' countries. Now, it is tempting to then just drop into your conversation with the

PLANNING WHAT TO WEAR

It's time to head for the interview and you have one question: what is the dress code?

Should you be strictly formal? Should you just go ahead and be yourself? After all, they won't want to employ yet another worker bee, will they? What about earrings, nose studs, tattoos, etc.? Should they come off? Would you make more of an impression if you stood out from the rest of the crowd?

Dressing for the interview is a big issue and many get it woefully wrong. The answer is actually very simple. The job interview is a formal meeting between people who are assessing each other's capability and suitability to work together in a professional environment which could lead to a legal formal agreement between an employee and employer – the employment contract – therefore it's not overstating the case to call it professional. The dress code then must obviously be biased towards the formal.

Prepare for it with all the seriousness it requires because you need to create an impression on those whom you are meeting that you are a responsible and resourceful kind of a person.

This means that the casual look or even the smart/casual look is out. It means that the conservative (no, that doesn't mean going for the David Cameron or John Major look, I meant with a small 'c') look is what you need to work at. Even if you are going for an interview as a call centre operative who has no contact whatsoever with the public or a part-time summer job, it will surely make a difference if you go to the interview dressed formally. One rule that most human resource people promote is that an applicant must dress as if he or she is going for the interview of a job one level higher than the post actually being applied for.

CHAPTER 6

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ... AND HOW TO ANSWER THEM

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR DRIVE FOR ACHIEVEMENT

Q Tell me what you know about our business?

This question falls into this category as the new employer will be assuming that you want to join their firm because it is a sound and progressive career move for you. It is, isn't it? That's a hint ... Again, this question will come up time after time. You expected it to be asked. Didn't you? So you went onto the Internet and 'Googled' their name. You went onto the corporate website and noted down some facts and figures.

Well, you employ some 15,000 people in over 12 countries, your main areas of operation are in textiles and in paper, your ...

Zzzzzzz – I'm asleep already. Any fool can regurgitate facts from a website. It doesn't mean you know anything about the company at all. Now while I'm not suggesting that you don't quote them some devastatingly interesting statistics around their niche market specialisms etc., what I am saying is get behind the facts that they present to you. What is their market share? Who are their competitors? What threats are there to their continuing growth? What opportunities might they wish to exploit? What did their CEO say in their last annual report?

By all means use the net, but don't just settle for the party line. Find out who their competitors are and what they are saying. Find out the registered office of the company and telephone their marketing department and request that they send out to you a copy of the most recent annual report. By law in the UK, PLCs must comply with this request from any person. I have had some fun over the years reminding junior clerks of this!

Can you imagine interviewing five people and all of them trot out the same facts and figures taken from the same source? What if the sixth interviewee reminds you that at the moment you are only number two in the world market; however, the CEO has a strategy in place to take you to number one, and that involves ... No contest! Get him/her back for a final interview.

I'm asking you to be a bit smarter than the average bear on this one. Be creative about how you illustrate what you know about their company.

Q Give an example of when you've experienced a setback

If you are asked this question at interview and you are unprepared for it you will probably make a hash of it. No question. It's the interviewer mining that negativity seam again and your auto-response will be to go into denial about it. After all, someone as brilliant as me gets it right first time, every time, don't I?

The trick here is to recall a time when, although the eventual outcome was positive, the success was down to either your intervention or your realisation that what you were doing first time round was not working. There's no shame in admitting that your initial approach to a situation turned out to be less effective than you'd hoped, but through your well

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Q Which is more important to you, the job itself or your salary?

Ah, now I bet you are thinking that they are trying to get you to admit that you are a greedy, grasping sod, now aren't you? Interviewers are realistic you know. Whilst surveys tell us that money isn't always the most important thing about work, there are damn few of us who would work for free! It's OK to mention salary in your response.

Like most people I suppose I am looking for a salary and benefits package commensurate with my experience and qualifications, and the relative worth you have already placed upon the role. However to me it's crucial to be in a job I'm enjoying and feel that I am making a genuine contribution to the success of the Company.

Q Why should we employ you rather than one of the other candidates?

Ouch! You didn't see that one coming, did you? Should you really be negative about the other candidates to paint you in a better light? Of course not. How could you be? You don't know them from Adam! The interviewer wants to know what unique quality makes you the best person for the job. To differentiate yourself from the other candidates, you must show that you have researched the company thoroughly and studied the job description. You should be prepared to demonstrate clearly how your skills, qualifications, and accomplishments match the employer's specific needs. It is important to convey genuine enthusiasm for the post. You might want to finish with:

Of course I have no idea of the quality of the other candidates, although they must be of a high quality for you to interview them. However I would like to think that by the end of this interview I will have done enough to convince you that I have everything that you are looking for and that I am the best choice in this instance.

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country. This would tell me that this is still a growing market for them to invest in new plant, and they might see benefits from economies of scale as they get larger, which would drive their costs down, making them more profitable and therefore more competitive. I also saw that XYZ have developed a new process which reduces the baking time of a loaf by 20 per cent. This will also make them tough to compete against.

I would say in order to secure the long-term success of your business you will need to ensure that you are keeping up with technological advances in the manufacture of your product. You will also have to tie your suppliers down to deals that secure your supply of raw material, with minimal fluctuations in price, and you will need to ensure that your distribution system is at least as good as your competitors to enable you to keep ahead of them in terms of getting goods to market as fresh as is possible.

This answer demonstrates your commercial and business acumen by offering the employer a chance to see that you can develop an opinion based on various sources of information – and not just regurgitate the corporate blurb.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In the vast majority of working environments, people are required to interact with others on some level or other. Your potential new employer is looking to reassure themselves that you will 'fit in'. 'Is that strictly necessary?' I hear you ask in a fiendishly clever, Devil's advocate sort of way. Look at it this way: how do you feel about new people coming to spend time with you? Be truthful, would you more expect them to fit into you and your group's social 'norms', or feel that it's more you and your group's responsibility to fit in with the new person? Hmm, call me psychic, but I'm betting it's the former.

The employer is using these questions in a two-pronged approach. Firstly, he or she may be exploring whether or not you can build relationships as that is part of the job requirement, or he/she might be seeking confirmation that you are of a similar personal disposition to the team where the vacancy lies.

My advice to you is, once again, to be true to yourself. If you try to adopt a persona that you feel is the type suited to the team in question and you get the job, it will not be that long before your true self comes out and that may be in conflict with others. There are not many people, actors excepted, that can carry off displaying behavioural characteristics that are different from their own for any length of time. You may also find that you have talked yourself into the job and regret it because your new colleagues 'are not your kind of people' either!

Q Tell me about a recent situation when you had to build a relationship with a new colleague. Why was the relationship important?

This question can be answered equally well from the point of view of a subordinate or a manager. As a manager your relationship with your

inexperienced employee would work with someone who had more experience (although sometimes not a lot more) for around two weeks. The team leader would then go through a checklist and tick off all the various boxes which were supposed to indicate that the new person was competent in that role. I was asked to take part in what is known as an 'intervention.' This is where a focus group made up of employees from various departments around the factory would examine a particular issue and find ways to resolve whatever the perceived problem was. The problem we were looking at was the quality of training of new starts. During this intervention, I was given the task of reviewing these 'competency profiles' as the checklists were known. After a little while I noticed that the wording on these checklists was weighted towards what inputs the employee had been given. For example: 'Has the employee been shown where the red emergency stop button is located?' and 'Has the employee been told what is the correct personal protective equipment to wear?' What struck me was that someone could have been told vital information – such as how to halt the machine in an emergency – but there was no guarantee that they had absorbed this information and could put it into use! As a lot of the plant and equipment was potentially dangerous, I flagged this up to the intervention leader. I suggested that we change the wording on all the checklists to record that the individual has demonstrated their knowledge, not just record the fact that they'd been informed. For example: 'Can the employee demonstrate the location of and correct usage of the red emergency stop button?' and 'Can the employee demonstrate the correct personal protective equipment they must wear and how to use it?' I also flagged up the fact that we had team leaders who were signing off people as competent on a machine or process that they themselves had not been trained on.

After a discussion with the members of the intervention team, we made this one of our key recommendations of the project. As a result, each team leader was tasked with rewriting each of the competency profiles in use in their area and they also had to be signed off as competent on each machine or process that they were signing other people off on.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR LEADERSHIP SKILLS

There comes a time in many people's career when they move up the greasy pole and take on the responsibility for others' work as well as their own. Many people only describe success in their chosen careers in terms of how far up the corporate tree they have climbed (to mix my metaphors). As yet, other methods of measuring career success have not fully been assimilated. So for the purposes of this chapter, we will treat any role that involves leading others as a 'good thing'. But have a look at what others have said about leadership before you decide exactly what type of a leader you are:

Dwight D. Eisenhower: 'You do not lead people by always hitting them over the head. That's as small as leadership.'

Faye Wattleton: 'The only safe ship in a storm is leadership.' Who also said: 'Whoever is providing leadership needs to be as fresh and thoughtful and reflective as possible to make the very best fight.'

The former British Prime Minister, James Callaghan, said: 'A leader must have the courage to act against an expert's advice.' *A more recent British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, also famously said:* 'The art of leadership is saying no, not yes. Its very easy to say yes.'

The answers I have given below are written from the perspective of someone who has actually led others before. However, it is always going to be a difficult position for someone who has never been a leader before to get across how good they 'would be' as a leader, as they have not been tested. However, if you can grasp the underlying principles of the answers here, then you can adopt your response accordingly, to a '... well, if I had been in that situation, I would have ...' etc.

Q Describe a time when you had to coordinate the work of other people.

- What were you trying to achieve?
- How did you go about organizing the work?

This is the classic version of this question. This is the big pink neon sign that says: 'C'mon! Show us just what a brilliant leader you are!' You can adapt your answer to fit depending on whether or not you have experience in leadership.

I was working as a member of the production staff for XYZ Co. and this year they conducted an employee satisfaction survey. Once all the results were in, a focus group was formed to look at the results. I was nominated from our area to be part of this group. I thought at first it was just a matter of turning up and expressing my opinion about the results. I quickly found out that the company was deadly serious about making changes based on the results of this survey. One of the results that came out was that people often felt that they were kept in the dark about what was going on with the company. 'Mushroom management' was the way one person described it! An action was formulated that stated a sub-group would examine the options for improving communications on site and I was designated the 'action point owner'. I was given a free hand to choose three or four people from the entire workforce – both blue and white collar – to work on this with me. I had a timescale for feeding back recommendations to the focus group. I thought the best approach would be to have team members with different skill sets to help us achieve our goal which was effectively to provide the employees by suitable means with the type of information that they wanted to hear. I thought about the various elements of the action point and had an idea of who I wanted in the team. I convened a meeting quickly and designated each team member with a particular role. I had a secretary devise, distribute and collate the results of a simple questionnaire to determine what exactly people wanted to know about; I chose one chap from our buying department and he was tasked with finding out exactly what ways we could use to get our message across.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

If you are applying for any sort of role within a company, particularly in the manufacturing sector, then it is almost certain that you will find yourself being asked questions about 'continuous improvement'. For those who do not know, continuous improvement is a philosophy which does exactly what it says on the tin: it's about looking for changes in the way people do things or processes are performed which provide incremental gains for the organisation. Larger organisations have whole continuous improvement departments where 'lean thinking' and 'just in time' approaches are commonplace. To survive, an organisation must always look to be increasing or maintaining its profits. (Yes, I can hear you say: 'But what about non-profit making organisations and charity pants?' These organisations do need to make a profit, perhaps not just in terms of money. Their 'profitability' may be a measure of the impact they make in their field. They will still need to have made a difference compared to their starting point, otherwise what would be the point of their existence?) There are only a limited number of ways to improve profits: sell more, sell at a higher price or spend less on your operations. For the individual employee, the easiest way for them to contribute is in the last area – reducing the cost of what we do.

The Japanese have a word for this philosophy: 'kaizen', which literally translated means 'little – good' demonstrating that the cumulative effect of little actions can have a dramatic effect overall and modern organisations these days recognise that every single employee can contribute to the success of the company no matter what their role. Each employee should be adding value in some way and everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the improvement of the way the business works.

While it may be obvious to those who are at the front line of manufacturing for instance to demonstrate savings made by actions they have taken which have increased productivity, candidates for any position should be ready to provide examples of where they challenged the status quo and made even the smallest of improvements. Below are some examples.

Q Tell us about how you normally cope with a lot of work.

- **Where do you start?**
- **What do you do to ensure it all gets done?**
- **What prevents you from getting it all done?**

I have deliberately included these questions in the continuous improvement section as good answers to these will demonstrate your ability to recognise and set priorities and be flexible in your approach, all of which show that there is no one answer to any problem and that the ability to make improvements and adjustments to your approach make for a continually improving performance.

I have worked in many roles where I am under pressure to get the work done accurately and on time. I start every morning with a modified 'To Do' list. Apart from being a simple list of things I need to get through, I divide them into four sections: 'Urgent', 'Important', 'Not Urgent' and 'Not Important'. I then look at the tasks and decide which categories they fall into. Of course they can be 'Urgent' and 'Not Important' or 'Important' but 'Not urgent' too or any combination, and it's the 'Urgent' and 'Important' that I work on first, with the 'Not Important' and 'Not Urgent' going to the bottom of my list. Of course, a task's status can change at any time and may move up or down the list, so to make it easier for me I have a clipboard permanently marked with the four categories onto which I stick the tasks written on post-it notes. That way it's easy to see where any task is in terms of status. When a task is complete, I remove the post-it from my clipboard.

I ensure it all gets done by referring to the 'expiry date' I write at the bottom of each post-it note and make sure these deadlines are met. At the end of the day I always go over what is left on the board and reconsider their status. If a deadline is looming I may move it into the 'Urgent' category for instance.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR INFLUENCING SKILLS

For the vast majority of us, our ability to make things happen through other people will come from being able to influence them rather than by our directing them. While we all may work in organisations that are hierarchical in structure, the stark reality is that most changes of direction come through decisions being made following acceptance of a point of view from individuals requiring the changes to be made. That's not to say that there are no direct 'chain of command' decisions, it's just that these tend to be for the more formal, strategic or tactical decisions, not the minutiae of everyday workplace life.

Think of it this way: where would we be without lies in our society? Our immediate thought might be 'in a much better world! Would we? It's the little lies which we recognise by all but are now edged by no one that oil the wheels of our social transactions. How many marriages would still be intact if the truthful answer to the question 'Does my bum look big in this?' were given? We are all subject to influence from our subordinates, peers and superiors at work without the need for formal orders being given or followed. While there are some roles which will obviously require you to have a fair amount of influencing skills – sales staff, marketing people, etc. – enlightened employers will recognise too that there may be occasions where you need to get things done by others when, strictly speaking, you don't have the authority to demand or instruct them to be done. For example, production people will always be at odds with maintenance people due to the conflicting agendas they have: production will always be wishing to produce, while maintenance will always seek to have production stopped in order for maintenance to be carried out properly. So, as you can see, you have probably applied for a position where your ability to influence others is an important part of your job – whether it is in the job description or not!

so' Most professional institutions such as the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development require their members to demonstrate continuing professional development and cite reading articles and books, watching TV shows, attending lectures or seminars, secondments, etc. as just as legitimate learning experiences as the more traditional types of learning such as courses of study which lead to a qualification.

This might be a typical answer:

I was watching the news only the other evening and there was a piece on the new anti-smoking legislation coming into force in England and what it would mean for employers. It struck me that there had been no discussion about this at work and it made me think we might be unprepared for what was coming. I went on the internet and downloaded the actual statutory instrument as well as all the comments on the ACAS and DTI websites and I also looked at discussion forums. I then took all this information to the HR officer. I was right. We were unprepared and I have been co-opted onto a committee which is looking at all the aspects of the legislation and we are tasked with coming up with policies and proposals for practical measures to make sure we comply.

Don't for a second think that this will make you look like a swot. Employers are desperate to find people who are prepared to 'go the extra mile' for them and use their own imagination and creativity to resolve problems and issues. This type of answer demonstrates to the interviewer that the candidate has an awareness of the bigger picture, a bit of get-up-and-go to do the research, and a willingness to help colleagues from other departments.

was made up of a diverse range of people in terms of their age, their background, their ethnicity and character. I felt it gave us a rounded view of things because of the variety of life views. There were some who were experts in the home market and some who were experts in the motor market. We were encouraged to share tips and tricks with each other and to bond as a team socially as well. I suppose the selling type environment would foster a strong team anyway, but I think it was more than that. When we socialised we always made it as inclusive as possible. For example, a couple of members of my team were Muslim girls and couldn't go into pubs, so we made sure that we didn't always suggest drinking as a social activity. I honestly believe that our closeness as a team of individuals made us better as a team collectively. What did I dislike? Well I think that sometimes it can be harder to be recognised for any special efforts you have made personally and that maybe you could get lost in the crowd a bit. Although, I think its probably down to the individual at their annual appraisal not to be shy in demonstrating what they've done well. I wouldn't say there's too much not to like about working in a team for me, maybe its not for everyone, but I thrive in that environment.

Q Tell me about a time when you had to get people to work together more supportively.

- **What caused the original difficulties?**
- **How did the others respond to you?**
- **What would you do differently next time?**

These type of questions may appear to be aimed at people who control the activities of team members, i.e. supervisors. However – and remember this because it is a truism not widely understood – while there may be a titular head of a team, there are also the unsung or unrecognised leaders of teams. These are those who, through respect from their peers or by a natural ability, actually influence the work of

Dear Charlie,

I have read your book on answering hard interview questions, however I would like to ask a question which relates specifically to salary.

I have a second interview for an audit manager position with a multinational organisation next week. The first interview went really well and the second stage comprises psychometric tests and a competency based interview where I will be asked to describe my actions in different business situations. Once this is complete and it's my chance to ask questions, should I approach the salary and benefits situation, or say nothing and assume they will go into detail with the recruitment consultant if I am successful? They have already explained the benefits in general with him before the first interview, but were reluctant to go into salary detail at that stage.

If I approach the subject it might look too presumptuous, but if I say nothing it could look as though I'm not interested?

Please advise,

Andy

Andrew

Thank you for your question.

This has always seemed a bit of a dilemma! Do I say nothing and appear *lassaiz faire*? Do I ask for something and appear greedy?

The position you describe seems to be fairly senior, so they will expect you to act with the utmost professionalism.

You must ask yourself what would be gained by asking what the package is at the 2nd interview. I'm guessing the reality is that it's just natural curiosity! If they told you then, and it didn't match your expectations, your face may give this away and it may subconsciously register negatively in their minds.

You say that you are there via an agency. That is always good from the candidate's point of view, because if you do enter into a negotiation with your potential employer, it will be less awkward as you have the agent as a buffer.

My advice is to be concerned strictly with the role and whether it is right for you – remember, an interview is as much about seeing if the role is what YOU want as it is to see if you are what THEY want!

If the job is right for you, then display some passion at the second interview. Leave them with the impression that you are dead keen without being creepy and coming over as desperate!

Once you get the offer via the agent, then your curiosity will be satisfied and you can then think about whether or not it meets your expectations!

Thank you for buying my book and the very best of luck with your interview!

Kind regards

Charlie Gibbs

As soon as it seems appropriate during the conversation, ask for a date to meet for a face-to-face interview. Say something like: 'Well, this certainly sounds like just the job I'm looking for, Mr X. I'm sure I can contribute a lot to your organisation. I'd really like to visit you to show you what I can offer. When and where would you meet me?'

You may have to be content with the response: 'Well, we have a few other candidates to talk to yet, but we will be in touch', but at the very least you can ask 'When am I likely to hear from you?'. If the manager umms and ahhs, decide upon a reasonable timescale, and, if possible, I'm very keen to know if I'm going forward to the next stage, so if I haven't heard from you by next Friday, would you mind if I call you then for find out?' This approach is particularly important if you are applying for sales jobs, as you are expected to demonstrate your natural salesmanship. But even in the case of other jobs, most people will appreciate your keenness and enthusiasm. If they don't, and you lose the job on account of being 'too pushy' (most unlikely), well, is it the sort of job you wanted anyway?

If after a telephone interview you don't get called to the next stage, do not be afraid to contact the recruiter again and ask for feedback on your performance. This will help you to improve your own skills and hopefully produce a more positive outcome in the future.

Q Describe a recent opportunity when you had to take on new responsibilities?

- How did the opportunity arise?
- What were these new responsibilities?
- What was the outcome?

Q Give an example of when you have set yourself an ambitious target.

- What made it so ambitious?
- How did it compare with other targets you had set yourself?
- How well did you do?

Q Describe a situation in which you had to work under pressure.

- What was the cause of the pressure?
- How did you feel under this pressure?
- What impact did this have on your work?

Q Tell me about a crisis you have handled recently.

- What caused it?
- What did you do to resolve it?
- What were your feelings at the time?

Q Tell us about a time when you felt that you were unfairly criticised.

- Why was this?
- How did you respond?
- What was the outcome?

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Puts sustained effort into building influential relationships.

Q Give me an example of a time when someone came to you for support or guidance.

- Why did they need your support?
- What did you do to support/guide them?
- How did it help?

Q Describe a time when you had to establish an effective relationship quickly.

- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?
- What did you learn from this?

Q In what past situations have you been most effective in building and maintaining relationships with others?

- What did you specifically do that was effective?

Q In which situations have you been least effective in building and maintaining relationships with others?

- What did you do that detracted from effectiveness?
- What would you have done differently?

Q What can you do to become more effective in this competency?

- What behaviours could you demonstrate more/less?

- What long-term impact did you have?
- How could you have increased this further?

Q Give an example of a time when you spotted a good business opportunity.

- What was this?
- Why did you think it was worthwhile?
- What was the outcome?

Q What general commercial factors do you think are most critical in managing the financial performance of any type of business?

- How commercial is your outlook compared to your peers?
- How do you know?
- What do you perceive to be your biggest commercial failure? Why?

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